

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



13 June 2016

Mr Max Vlahakis
Interim executive headteacher
Palfrey Junior School
Dale Street
Walsall
West Midlands
WS1 4AH

Dear Mr Vlahakis

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Palfrey Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 25 May 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school. The school should take further action to:

- make sure that senior leaders identify the specific actions that teachers will take to help different groups of pupils make faster progress
- ensure that teachers provide pupils with more opportunities to deepen their mathematical understanding, especially the most able pupils
- make sure that the school improvement plan has measurable success criteria against which success can be measured.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the interim executive headteacher, who is also the executive headteacher of the Alumwell Junior/Butts Federation, the two interim deputy headteachers, three representatives from the interim executive board (IEB) and the headteacher of Butts Primary School to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with a local authority representative. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A range of documentation was reviewed, including the latest information about pupils' achievement, information about the quality of teaching and senior leaders' feedback to teachers following lesson observations. The two interim deputy headteachers joined me on brief visits to all classes. We spoke with pupils about their learning and reviewed examples of pupils' work in different subjects.

Context

In June 2014, the local authority put in place an IEB. The substantive headteacher of Palfrey Junior School has been absent from the school due to ill health since October 2015. The local authority arranged for the headteachers from the Alumwell Junior/Butts Federation to support senior leaders at Palfrey Junior School in October 2015. At the same time, the IEB appointed the headteacher of Alumwell Junior School as the interim executive headteacher.

It is proposed that Palfrey Junior School will join the Alumwell Junior/Butts Federation from July 2016.

Main findings

You, the headteacher of Butts Primary School and the interim deputy headteachers have taken decisive action in response to the areas for improvement identified in the most recent inspection. During my brief visits to classes, pupils of all ages were keen to talk to me about the changes that have taken place in the school. Senior leaders, for example, have worked with staff to make important changes to the curriculum. Teachers now make sure that the activities they plan capture pupils' interests and encourage pupils to be inquisitive. One pupil, echoing the views of many, stated, 'We have fun and learn at the same time.'

Your records of teaching show that teaching is improving. Senior leaders make sure that teachers and teaching assistants receive the personalised support that they need to improve their practice. You also make sure that prompt action is taken when teaching does not improve quickly enough. Following lesson observations and reviews of pupils' work, senior leaders and class teachers discuss and agree the actions that will be taken to help raise pupils' achievements. However, these actions are sometimes too general and do not identify what teachers will do to help different groups of pupils, such as the most able, make faster progress.

Pupils' work shows that teachers successfully encourage pupils to learn how to write through, for instance, letters, diary entries and stories. Teachers also make sure that pupils spell correctly and use punctuation and grammar with increasing accuracy. An effective example of this was seen in Year 5 where pupils were writing about a dragon. Pupils used dictionaries to check their spellings, they read their work carefully to make sure that it made sense, and they paid careful attention to the words they used in order to make their writing interesting.

Although teachers are getting better at planning mathematical activities that promote pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills, you have correctly identified that there is scope for developing this aspect of mathematics further. Work in pupils' books shows that in a few classes pupils, and particularly the most able, are not given sufficient opportunities to deepen their mathematical understanding. You have arranged for staff to receive further training on reasoning and problem-solving in mathematics.

Actions taken to raise the achievement of pupils who have special educational needs or disability are having a positive impact. Teachers use information about what these pupils can already do to plan suitably challenging work. When working with individuals or small groups, teaching assistants make sure that these pupils receive helpful guidance and that they have suitable resources to complete their work.

In 2015, Year 6 pupils did not make enough progress from their different starting points at the end of Year 2. Also, pupils' attainment in mathematics and English grammar was significantly below average. It was similar to the national average in reading and writing. The school's latest information about pupils' achievement and work in pupils' books shows that standards are rising quickly and pupils are making better progress than in the past. You and other senior leaders have undertaken a detailed analysis of the achievement of different groups. This analysis confirms that further work is now required to help pupils make consistently good progress. In response to this, senior leaders are making sure that pupils who are not on track to achieve their learning targets receive additional support. This is helping pupils to catch up.

The members of the IEB have been instrumental in working with the local authority to enhance the leadership of the school. Members of the IEB are well informed and this enables them to ask probing questions about pupils' achievement and teaching. The school improvement plan identifies the appropriate actions that will be taken to raise pupils' achievement and improve teaching. However, the success criteria are not sufficiently measurable. This makes it difficult for the IEB to check the impact of leaders' actions on pupils' learning and teaching.

External support

The local authority responded quickly to the absence of the headteacher and arranged for the headteachers of the Alumwell Junior/Butts Federation to provide

long-term support for senior leaders at Palfrey Junior School. The local authority adviser provides a good level of support and challenge through her regular visits to the school. This combined assistance from the local authority has contributed to improvements in teaching and pupils' achievement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board and the director of children's services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Usha Devi

Her Majesty's Inspector