

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



17 April 2018

Mrs Deborah Ward
Headteacher
Croftway Primary Academy
William Street
Blyth
Northumberland
NE24 2HP

Dear Mrs Ward

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Croftway Primary Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 21 March 2018, 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in April 2017. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

I am copying this letter to chair of the board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northumberland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2017.

- Urgently improve the quality of teaching, so that it is at least good, in order to improve progress for all groups of pupils by:
 - planning and delivering teaching that is well matched to pupils' needs and that ensures gaps in learning are promptly addressed
 - having higher expectations for pupils' outcomes based around the school's recently established pupil-progress tracking information that is linked to the national curriculum
 - improving opportunities for pupils to improve their English grammar, punctuation and spelling skills and to apply these in their writing
 - further developing the consistency of the teaching of reasoning and problem-solving in mathematics
 - making further use of the stronger practice which exists in the school to provide models of effective teaching for other teachers
 - improving the deployment of teaching assistants so that their impact upon pupils' learning is greater
 - ensuring that the early years provision helps disadvantaged children to make accelerated progress so that the differences between their outcomes and others nationally is diminished year-on-year.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - further developing pupils' resilience and determination when faced with challenging tasks
 - increasing attendance levels and reducing persistent absence for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership by:
 - implementing phase and subject leaders' planned actions to rapidly improve pupils' progress, particularly in writing and mathematics, and regularly checking for impact
 - improving the planning, monitoring and evaluation of pupil premium spending and funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to ensure that their progress improves.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 21 March 2018

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you, your senior leaders and middle leaders. I also held a meeting with a group of pupils and talked to pupils in lessons about their learning. I met the chief executive of the academy trust and held a telephone conversation with the chair of the local academy committee. I observed learning in the early years and in Year 2 and Year 6. I held meetings with subject leaders for English and mathematics and looked at work in pupils' books and folders. I also talked to colleagues who provide support for pupils' behaviour and welfare and I met the special educational needs coordinator. I looked at a range of documents from school leaders and external partners which covered many aspects of the school's performance, including a review of the use of pupil premium funding. I also considered attendance and safeguarding documents. The ongoing impact of the school's improvement plan and the trust's statement of action was also considered.

Context

On 18 January 2018, the regional schools commissioner agreed to the re-brokering of Croftway Primary Academy under the sponsorship of the Wise Academies Trust. These arrangements are scheduled to come into effect in September 2018. At present, the Blyth Quays Trust, under the leadership of an interim chief executive officer, retains full responsibility for Croftway Primary Academy and will do so until the re-brokering process is complete. Both trusts are working cooperatively with one another and have planned joint meetings with parents and carers to keep them fully informed of the proposed changes.

Since my last visit in December 2017, one teacher has left the school. Two higher-level teaching assistants have been appointed to provide support in key stage 1. The headteacher is currently working on a staffing restructure to streamline staffing roles and ensure long-term financial stability.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

Your strong and clear leadership has brought sustained pace and purpose to the school's improvement journey. You and your deputy headteacher have worked closely with middle leaders to develop the expertise of teachers and teaching assistants and to improve the quality of teaching. Your collective actions to swiftly address previous gaps in pupils' learning and to strengthen the curriculum are leading to marked improvements in the rates of pupils' progress. There is consistent evidence that teachers' planning incorporates much higher levels of challenge and is more deftly pitched to meet the needs of their pupils.

Middle leaders are continuing to secure improvements in the quality of pupils' reading

and writing. New strategies are encouraging pupils to explore more challenging texts with greater focus, developing their skills of inference and deduction and the breadth of their vocabulary. Teachers are using a range of strategies to develop pupils' imaginations and their ideas for writing. As a result, pupils of differing abilities are developing their writing stamina and confidence in writing at length. Recent priorities to improve the quality of pupils' spelling and grammar are beginning to have effect, although variance remains as these actions are at an early stage. In mathematics, you and your subject leaders continue to make daily visits to lessons to monitor progress and develop teachers' expertise. New resources are being used by pupils and staff to develop their understanding of number. While your own assessments confirm that much work is needed to address historical gaps in pupils' mathematical knowledge, you and your team are working strenuously to achieve this.

In discussion, pupils identified many aspects of the school's improvement. They felt that behaviour was stronger because teaching was more exciting and engaging. They identified many improvements in the teaching of mathematics, valuing opportunities to reinforce their understanding by using practical resources and to embrace higher levels of challenge. Pupils once again commented upon a much more positive school culture, with more regular rewards for progress and behaviour that were celebrated at school events. All of the pupils I talked to felt that school had improved significantly over the past two terms and could describe these improvements in an articulate and insightful manner.

Leaders are continuing to strengthen the quality of provision in the early years. They have built upon your initial actions to enhance learning areas with more focused actions to build children's vocabulary and understanding of number. During this inspection, children were seen exploring the relative sizes of objects and developing more subtle vocabulary to describe those objects. You have continued to enhance the expertise of teaching assistants through specific speech and language training. You have also agreed plans to develop the outdoor learning environment. These cumulative actions are leading to increasing proportions of children achieving a good level of development. By concentrating so sharply upon essential skills in reading and number, you are providing a strong base to support progress in future years.

Since my last visit, you have further refined the structure of the family team to enhance support for pupils and families. Leaders now have a much stronger role in signposting families to sources of additional support and in helping parents to engage more effectively with external agencies. The team have set up a parenting group to provide direct support from the school to families. You have worked closely with the educational welfare officer from the trust to track and improve attendance, which is now in line with that seen nationally. You have experienced a slight rise in the number of pupils being excluded from the school because of concerns over their behaviour. However, you have ensured that additional support is in place for those pupils with more significant behavioural needs. In some cases, the support plans for these pupils would benefit from clearer milestones to check how support is improving their behaviour over time. The family team demonstrate signs of

increased engagement with families and external agencies, and are further developing systems to evaluate the effect of their work.

In other areas, middle leaders are continuing to develop their roles. You continue to track the effect of additional funding for pupils eligible for the pupil premium and for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Regular reviews with external consultants are ensuring that the pupil premium strategy is evaluated on a continual basis. Your special educational needs coordinator now has greater time to work with pupils, parents and external agencies to support pupils' needs. A wide range of partnerships are in place to support pupils' needs in communication and language and to support their social and emotional development. You have worked with staff to develop their expertise in speech and language, including dyslexia support, to strengthen the school's own capacity to support pupils who have SEN. On occasions, some of the systems to monitor the progress of pupils who have SEN are not as fully developed.

You have continued to maintain a strong focus upon the effective use of teaching assistants. You have introduced systems to ensure that regular planning takes place between teachers and teaching assistants. Teaching assistants are now present at all staff development meetings and receiving training that is helping them to fulfil their roles more effectively. They have clear performance management targets and are regularly held to account for the impact of the support they provide. In discussion, it is clear that teaching assistants believe that they are now more involved in the school improvement process and have a heightened sense of accountability for the children they support. They feel that their roles have become more demanding but also more rewarding as they have a clearer awareness of the effect of the support they provide.

You have maintained the pace of improvement while continuing to reflect upon quality of improvement activities. You have greatly improved the quality of assessment. There is evidence that teachers' feedback is enabling pupils to make stronger progress. You and your team engage with local schools and the trust to moderate standards. You realise that the system to track pupils' overall progress that you inherited is not well suited to your needs and are exploring a system that is more fit for purpose. You have developed a culture that is focused upon improvement. When senior and middle leaders visit lessons, they offer immediate advice so that improvements can be addressed swiftly at source. You and your team have maintained exemplary levels of monitoring, consistently checking that the quality of pupils' work meets your high expectations. Indeed, the work in pupils' books shows that your high expectations are being embraced by pupils and staff, providing a strong platform for sustained improvement.

External support

The action group, comprising trust members, officers and the headteacher, continues to monitor the ongoing impact of the school improvement plan. The group now meets every half term to review the pace of improvement. They have

been able to scale down the frequency of review meetings due to the strong signs of emerging improvement.

School leaders have continued to work with external partners to develop expertise and review performance. Middle leaders have worked with consultants to improve the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics. A number of colleagues have worked with consultants to provide more effective communication and language support and to enhance provision for pupils' social and emotional needs.

School leaders have continued to invite thorough and ongoing scrutiny. The headteacher has ensured that the review of the use of the pupil premium provides regular insight over the course of the academic year. The Wise Academies Trust carried out an initial visit to consider many aspects of the school's work in February 2018, discovering many extremely strong examples of effective practice.