

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Miss Linda Rice
Principal
Knowsley Lane Primary School
Astley Road
Huyton
Liverpool
Merseyside
L36 8DB

Dear Miss Rice

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Knowsley Lane Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 23 November 2017, 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 September 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, the local governing body and the trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy principal and the executive principal, who is also the chief executive officer (CEO) of the multi-academy trust, and with your school improvement adviser. I also met with your mentor, two subject leaders and members of the governing body. We discussed the actions the school has taken since the last inspection. You and I visited classrooms to observe pupils at work. I met with a group of eight pupils to gain their views of the school and spoke to others informally. I observed pupils' behaviour around school at lunchtime. I evaluated your school improvement plan, your evaluation of the school's effectiveness, the annual review from the multi-academy trust and other evidence. I also examined teaching and learning records and pupils' books.

Context

Since the last inspection, you have been appointed to the position of principal and your predecessor has left the school. Your assistant principal has been promoted to the position of deputy principal. Three new governors have joined the governing body to ensure that there is an increased number of governors who have a background in education. Leadership training has been provided to the principal, deputy principal, middle leaders and teachers wishing to move into a leadership role. Morale is high and staff members are driven by a shared vision and set of values. The school welcomes its local community into the building. Attendance has improved significantly and the number of families applying for a place in the school has increased.

Main findings

Your strong leadership and the commitment to excellence of your team have resulted in a school which is vibrant, exciting and forward-thinking. Pupils understand the school's values and personal learning goals are displayed around the building. Classrooms are places of sanctuary where pupils have a broad range of opportunities to challenge their thinking and move their learning forward swiftly. Relationships between pupils and adults are a strength of your school. You provide opportunities for high-quality outdoor learning and areas in school to support pupils' social and emotional needs. Your therapy dog, Piper, also offers additional support when pupils need a little more reassurance. You proudly note that the learning environment exemplifies all that you do. For this reason, you have placed great emphasis on displays which promote potential and aspiration. One pupil noted, 'We have to work hard in school if we want to achieve our aspirations.'

You use a broad range of evidence to ensure that you have a thorough and detailed understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This includes detailed assessment information and annual reviews undertaken by the multi-academy trust. Such evidence enables you to work with governors and other leaders to build well-structured development plans. All members of staff understand what the school's priorities are and have a clear understanding of their role in achieving high outcomes for pupils.

At the previous inspection, inspectors highlighted a need to improve the quality of teaching and the accuracy of assessment to further increase pupils' attainment and progress. You have taken swift and effective action in this area. Members of staff receive a broad range of training to develop their understanding of the curriculum, planning methods, questioning skills and assessment. This enables them to challenge pupils in all areas of their learning. As a consequence, your self-evaluation highlights that all teaching within school is now at least good.

You ensure that classroom displays, resources and learning opportunities provide a high level of challenge and opportunities for pupils to work independently. Your detailed monitoring shows that challenge takes place across all areas of the curriculum. For example, in music, pupils may choose to take part in a music club and a concert each year. There are also opportunities for the most able musicians to receive the tuition necessary to achieve high results in examinations. As a result, a significant number of the pupils who passed music examinations in the local authority this year were from your school and there was a 100% pass rate among the pupils you entered.

You ensure that funding to provide additional support for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively. You provide training for leaders and staff to aid them in effectively supporting the learning needs of this group of pupils. You also provide opportunities for additional support where this is necessary. Senior leaders have improved the content of pupils' progress meetings to ensure that they are more focused on the needs of individual groups and are more strategic in their outlook. As a consequence, teachers are confident in accounting for the progress of all groups of pupils.

At the previous inspection, the quality of leadership and management was highlighted as a concern. Once again, you have secured improvement in this area. You provide opportunities for your staff to share best practice within your school, across the multi-academy trust and in other schools within the local authority. Leaders model lessons for other members of staff. This ensures that teachers can learn from the best practice in school.

Your senior leaders have worked effectively with subject leaders. Your deputy principal provides detailed training and lesson observation skills are modelled for subject leaders. They have time to undertake tasks which further develop their understanding of their role. These leaders now undertake a broad range of monitoring activities to ensure that high standards of teaching, learning and assessment are evident in their subjects. Your subject leaders have grown in confidence and know their subjects well. You are slowly removing the support from senior leaders for this group as you identify the strengths of staff. Some subject leaders undertake national leadership training. This ensures that their skills develop beyond their subject areas and are transferable across the middle leadership band.

Senior leaders and governors are justly proud of the progress made by the subject leaders, but they aspire for more. Their vision is that subject leaders will have opportunities to share their good practice, skills and knowledge across the multi-academy trust. Such vision for the future is in line with your drive for developing potential and aspiration for all members of your school team.

Key stage 1 assessment was not always accurate in previous years and this had a negative impact on the accuracy of progress measures at the end of key stage 2. To

address this issue, you provide teachers with detailed training and guidance on how to check pupils' progress across the whole curriculum. This enables teachers to measure and accurately analyse the performance and progress of all groups of pupils. Curriculum targets and assessment information are provided to the school improvement partner, the chair of the governing body and to other governors prior to meetings. This enables governors to analyse data closely and to ask challenging questions relating to leaders' actions to improve school performance. As a consequence, governors have a clear understanding of the school's performance.

In the previous inspection, an external review of governance was recommended. In January 2017, a national leader of governance, working with the multi-academy trust's CEO, led the development of the local governing body. The governors were aware that their breadth of expertise required further expansion. Three new governors were appointed who had a background in education. This strengthened the local governing body and enabled leaders in school to receive well-informed and directed support. Your CEO ensured that all existing and new governors received detailed induction training. From this starting point, governors now receive ongoing training on a broad range of areas, including assessment. The positive impact has been clear and strong. Meetings are impact-driven. There is a clear focus on assessment and pupils' progress. Training has ensured that governors challenge appropriately and ask insightful questions. As a result of focused support from the multi-academy trust, governors' meetings are now an open forum where all members speak in a supportive and open environment. They are working closely with the multi-academy trust to build consistency, confidence and competence. This is summed up by one governor who said, 'We have a shared sense of purpose.'

As a result of this focused approach, the leadership and management structure within your school is efficient and skilled enough to support your ongoing improvement.

External support

You value the advice given to you by both your school improvement partner and your mentor who works with you for 38 days each year. You work closely with principals from other academies in the trust to bring about school improvement. You ensure that your leaders benefit from the 'hubs' that exist between the academies and also the moderation groups which support the assessment of writing across the school. The multi-academy trust offers you focused support in bringing about school improvement. Working with you, it now undertakes an annual review to identify areas for improvement. You also make effective use of external support to ensure that the school is in a strong position to grow and develop further in the future.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the CEO of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on

the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gill Pritchard
Her Majesty's Inspector