

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



2 October 2017

Mrs Anna Thwaites
Headteacher
Queen's Park Academy
Chestnut Avenue
Bedford
Bedfordshire
MK40 4HA

Dear Mrs Thwaites

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Queen's Park Academy

Following my visit to your school on 11 September 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 February 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders 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.

The school should take further action to:

- carry out the review of governance with urgency and implement recommendations swiftly to improve the effectiveness of governance
- adapt leaders' strategic plans so that there are clear milestones and success criteria for monitoring and evaluating the impact of actions
- accelerate the progress pupils make in key stage 2, particularly in reading and writing

- continue a rigorous focus on the areas for improvement identified in the full inspection report.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders and a representative from the governing body. A telephone call was held with an external adviser for school improvement to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement and subject action plans were evaluated. All classes were visited to observe pupils during their lessons. I spoke with pupils to gain their views on the school. A wide range of documents were scrutinised to determine the progress school leaders have made since the section 5 inspection.

Context

Since the inspection in February 2017, you have recruited and developed your leadership team. All the senior leadership roles are now fully in place and each of the assistant headteachers has clear roles and responsibilities. Together, you have a shared dedication and commitment to improve pupils' achievement. These leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and the capacity for quickening the pace of improvement over this academic year.

There is new leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Already, the needs of these pupils have been identified and actions are under way to improve their provision.

Over the summer months, your responsibility for the governance of the community nursery ceased. It is now the responsibility of an independent charity.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, leaders have adapted and further developed their school improvement plans to take account of the Ofsted areas for improvement. You are rightly prioritising the issues raised in the inspection and continue to increase the accountability of staff through regular monitoring. You and your senior leaders are much better placed to accelerate the pace of improvement further so that pupils' achievement rises quickly. You have clear monitoring and evaluation schedules and plans so that the impact of leadership is much greater than previously.

The impact of your work on the areas for improvement identified in the report around key stage 2 is still to be seen. The proportion of pupils who reached the required standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined was much lower than the national average. The progress these pupils made over their time at Queen's Park was below average in writing.

However, the results in mathematics were much stronger at both key stage 1 and key stage 2, with pupils making better progress than in English. You have already started this academic year with higher standards and expectations. Your school information shows that current pupils in Year 6 are making better progress from their starting points.

Your assistant headteachers have been quick to analyse the key stage 2 results and write clear action plans for this academic year so that teaching can more precisely meet the needs of pupils in Year 6. Their individual plans link closely with the whole-school priorities. These plans still require clearer milestones and success criteria so that leaders can evaluate the impact of their work on the progress pupils make.

The review of governance has not yet taken place. You have been concerned with a slower pace of change around governance. At the time of my visit, the chair of governors had stepped down and I was unable to meet the replacement. However, you have enlisted some educational expertise to join the governing body. Currently, governors are liaising with the Department for Education in clarifying and updating the agreed terms for governance at the school. The governor review dates are set for this autumn term, and you have appointed a new clerk to improve the recording of meetings. Although it is too soon to assess the impact, you appreciate the support and challenge you receive from the new experienced governor.

Leaders have extensively changed curriculum planning to ensure that pupils of all abilities receive their full entitlement and make good progress in their learning. Currently, you are training staff so that they have a clear understanding of your high expectations, including the non-negotiable rules that you insist upon in the classroom. For example, you recognise that science teaching has not been effective enough and this is included in your plans for this year. The proportion of pupils who reached the required standard in science at both key stages 1 and 2 was below national averages.

The quality of training of staff and the clarity with which they are held to account for the progress that pupils make are improving rapidly. This academic year, staff are already supporting each other to improve and develop their teaching skills. In this way, everyone is involved in the journey of moving the school to 'good'. Pupils told me how much they appreciate their teachers and enjoy their learning, particularly in mathematics. They told me that they would like even more complex mathematical activities so that they can develop their skills further.

Pupils are polite and welcoming. They demonstrate that they are keen to learn and they respond swiftly to adults' instructions. Consequently, lessons can proceed without the need for interruption. However, in some classes, teachers' expectations are not clear and school policies are not followed as well as they should be. For example, the framework used by the school to develop positive attitudes to learning and increase attendance is proving successful in key stage 2. But this framework is

not consistently applied for the younger pupils, where lower attendance is now focused. This remains a priority for school improvement and is clearly written into your plans for this academic year.

Provision in the early years continues to improve. By the end of 2016/17, the proportion of children who left Reception achieving a good level of development was higher than the previous two years. Although still below the national average, this represents good progress for many children who often start the school with language skills that are lower than expected for their age. The early years leader is focused on continuing this improvement and has set targets closer to national achievement for this academic year, especially in reading, writing and mathematics. The impact of leaders' work is bearing fruit at the start of children's academic lives.

Pupils' achievement in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2016/17 was similar to the previous year and remained below the national average. The quality of the teaching of early reading through phonics was identified as weak in the full inspection. This remains a priority for this year. Adults still do not use pure sounds well enough when teaching pupils. Your plans show that, with your more consistent approach and rigorous monitoring, the quality of teaching in phonics is set to change and improve at a faster rate.

Your records and documentation, especially when recruiting and vetting new staff, are well kept and in good order. You ensure that staff adhere to the procedures and processes for keeping pupils safe in school.

External support

You are working closely with an external consultant. You value the support and challenge from their regular visits in helping you sharpen the priorities for school improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector