

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Justin Philcox
Churchfield Church School
Burnham Road
Highbridge
Somerset
TA9 3JF

Dear Mr Philcox

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Churchfield Church School

Following my visit to your school on 28 January 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

At its section 5 inspection, before the one that took place on 14–15 November 2017, the school was also judged to require improvement.

The senior leaders and trust are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good. Despite making needed improvements, there are still too many weaknesses that are barriers to raising pupils' achievement quickly enough, in particular, the teaching of phonics and reading.

The school should take further action to:

- urgently improve teachers' subject knowledge to raise pupils' achievement, particularly in phonics and reading
- improve the quality and precision of leaders' monitoring and evaluation so that pupils make strong progress, particularly those who need to catch up
- improve the teaching of mathematics to ensure that pupils gain greater confidence in arithmetic, including recalling known number facts to solve problems efficiently.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the English and mathematics subject leaders, as well as the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). Further meetings were held with representatives from the multi-academy trust, including the regional director and interim director for teaching and learning. I also met with the chair of the governing body to discuss the impact of governors' actions since the last inspection. The school's and trust's improvement plans were evaluated. Furthermore, learning walks with the deputy headteacher were undertaken to sample the quality of teaching and learning, with a particular focus on reading and mathematics. Other inspection activities included: an open meeting with staff to evaluate their views of pupils' behaviour and the school's ethos; listening to pupils read in Years 1 and 2, and reviewing the accuracy of teachers' assessment information.

Context

You and the deputy were in post not long before the previous inspection. Since then, there have been significant changes to staffing, including nine new teachers and new appointments to key leadership roles. More recent changes include a re-structure of the school's leadership team, including the English subject leader and SENCo. The school remains part of the Bath and Wells multi-academy trust. The trust has provided ongoing support through a range of activities, including termly core group meetings to review the school's progress, regular visits from the regional director, and the support of a consultant executive headteacher in the previous year.

Main findings

Following your arrival and the subsequent appointment of the deputy headteacher, you have established systems to hold teachers to account. You have challenged teachers to improve and raise their expectations of what pupils can achieve, as well as improving pupils' attitudes to learning. This has ensured that teaching and learning are improving. However, some remaining weaknesses have not been identified or tackled quickly enough. These continue to slow the progress of pupils, particularly in the teaching of phonics in key stage 1 and in reading. Furthermore, pupils' knowledge of number facts and arithmetic is still too weak. This means that pupils lack confidence and fluency to solve mathematical problems efficiently.

You have taken the appropriate action to introduce systems to check the quality of teaching and review pupils' progress. For example, you track pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics to identify pupils who are at risk of underachieving. You share information with teachers and hold meetings to set targets. However, targets are not refined, specific or measurable to build on what pupils already know or overcome barriers for pupils well enough. This includes vulnerable pupils, such as disadvantaged pupils or those with special educational

needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Consequently, teachers are not consistently using and applying well-matched strategies to meet the full range of pupils' needs to ensure enough good progress.

Following a restructure of your leadership team, you have made some strong appointments. In particular, the deputy headteacher, SENCo and English subject leaders share skills, knowledge and expertise to add further capacity in leading the school. However, as yet, they have not been able to monitor their areas of responsibility sufficiently or with the rigour and precision to accurately evaluate strengths and weaknesses in teaching. Leaders have not checked the quality of teaching in phonics and reading in key stage 1 or mathematics well enough. As a result, leaders have not identified the weaknesses in teachers' and teaching assistants' subject knowledge, which still contribute to weak outcomes for some pupils.

Pupils are still exposed to misconceptions, such as: incorrect explanations of the value of different digits for calculating in mathematics; or providing text which is too difficult for pupils to gain speed, fluency and understanding over the page during lessons aimed at developing pupils' comprehension skills. There are also inconsistencies in the teaching of phonics and weak assessments in phonics and teaching which act as a barrier to raising achievement in these areas. Weaknesses in monitoring teaching and learning (where leaders typically focus on teaching routines and teachers' actions rather than the pupils' progress) sometimes skews leaders' views of the effectiveness of teaching.

Governors are not yet confident in undertaking their roles and responsibilities effectively. Although there is a mutual understanding between governors and the trust, governors' monitoring is not stringent in holding leaders to account. Governors do not probe deeply or revisit issues to ensure that they contribute well enough to school improvement. Consequently, weaknesses are not being identified quickly enough by senior leaders, middle leaders or governors.

During the inspection, I also evaluated the school's safeguarding arrangements. These are fully fit for purpose to meet the Department for Education (DfE) requirements. Mandatory checks, vetting and training are completed assiduously. As a result, staff are well trained and knowledgeable in keeping pupils safe. Your staff, including those in the pastoral team, know their responsibilities well. They fully understand and have used the school's referral and escalation processes to ensure pupils' safety. You, and your team, work effectively with other professional agencies and are tenacious in holding them to account at times when this is warranted. Pupils told me that they feel safe and trust adults. A very small minority of staff raised concerns about pupils' safety during lunchtimes. However, senior leaders are aware of these concerns and are being proactive in addressing them. Staff also felt that they trust their line managers and can raise any concerns through these channels if they needed to.

External support

The trust has provided ongoing support to the school. It has been influential in supporting the headteacher to make changes where these have been required, including teaching and in implementing the leadership restructure. Support and challenge has also come through strategy meetings which include the regional director. There has also been additional support 'on the ground', for example in deploying a consultant headteacher to work alongside the headteacher during his induction. The regional director has also attended termly meetings with the governing body. There are positive relationships between senior leaders and representatives of the trust.

The trust's plan accurately identifies many of the school's weaknesses. However, alongside senior school leaders and governors, there has not been sufficient rigour in their evaluations to make consistently accurate judgements. This has left the school vulnerable to being too generous, particularly with regard to the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.

I am copying this letter to the executive board, and the chief executive officer or equivalent of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Bath and Wells, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stewart Gale
Her Majesty's Inspector