

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Michael Arthur
Headteacher
Toner Avenue Primary School
Johnston Avenue
Hebburn
Tyne and Wear
NE31 2LJ

Dear Mr Arthur

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Toner Avenue Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 20 May 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the 2020-21 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance are not taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure pupils attend school full time, so that they have the maximum opportunity to catch up lost ground
- provide teachers with better training and support to be able to implement curriculum plans more effectively. In particular, ensure teachers have better

examples of the type of subject-appropriate learning activities that pupils should complete in different subjects

- make sure adults who listen to children read focus more on the repetition of whole words, phrases, and sentences to improve fluency.

Context

Since the remote additional monitoring inspection in February there have been no changes in senior leadership. One teacher has left the school and their class is currently being taught by a temporary teacher.

Main findings

Your efforts to help children catch up are being undermined by closing the school at a Friday lunchtime each week. You and the governors brought in this policy last September. There were exceptional circumstances regarding COVID-19 at the time. It may have been sensible then but, following the extended national lockdown, many pupils have returned to school with considerable gaps in their knowledge. Continuing to close early on a Friday is not in their best interests. The policy is not helping them to catch up.

It became clear during this inspection that the pandemic has been detrimental for many pupils at Toner Avenue Primary. The impact has been greatest on the younger ones. Many pupils have fallen well behind in reading. The reading leader is concerned about this. She estimates that children in the Reception Year and pupils in Years 1 and 2 are between three to six months behind where they should be. Teachers are still re-teaching phonics that pupils should have learned last year. You told me that your efforts to help pupils catch up in reading are likely to stretch well into the next year. The policy of closing the school early on a Friday is not helping to overcome this problem. It is reducing the precious time in which pupils should be helped to catch up.

In other ways, senior leaders have taken some positive decisions, which are improving the school. Leaders have provided training to develop the quality of subject leadership. Subject leaders have worked hard to improve their curriculum plans. In most subjects, curriculum planning is much better. Plans now make clear the knowledge that pupils need to learn. The plans are more ambitious. Subject leaders also have time to check how well their plans are being delivered.

However, my checks on pupils' books showed there is still much to do. Teachers are not making good use of curriculum planning. They are not covering the knowledge properly. Some teachers need more help to understand what is expected of them. As yet, too much work in pupils' books is shallow and superficial. Too often tasks set by teachers focus on general writing skills, when they should be focused on specific

geographical or historical knowledge. As a result, pupils' memory of the topics they have been taught is patchy.

Teachers are developing some effective approaches to teaching early reading. Teachers in the lower school have been trained in the school's phonics programme. Teachers worked hard to sustain phonics teaching during the national lockdown, but pupils have fallen behind. More urgency is needed to get them back on track. You have introduced more one-to-one reading for pupils. However, some adults need to do more to help pupils to read more fluently.

Around one in five pupils in the school has special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This is well above the national average. On this inspection, I looked at the quality of assessments and your plans to support these pupils. The deputy headteacher has established clear systems to identify pupils with additional needs. She works closely with external specialists to identify the best way forwards. Each pupil has a clear and informative action plan that sets out what the school will do to help. In the lessons I visited it was clear that teachers and teaching assistants are making sound use of these action plans to support pupils.

The governors have maintained their role while operating remotely during the pandemic. They have continued to meet with senior leaders and to hold them to account. They are beginning to ask some good, probing questions about the impact of the school's work on the curriculum. They have also begun to challenge more. For example, in a recent governing body meeting, a governor questioned the policy to close the school early on a Friday. However, governors need to show more urgency in addressing the barriers that are preventing the school from delivering a good quality of education.

Additional support

You have welcomed the support and scrutiny from the local authority adviser linked to the school. You have made good use of the advice provided. This has helped you to develop your curriculum thinking and to take decisions to improve teaching. The local authority believe they advised against the early closure of the school on Fridays, although the governors dispute this.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, curriculum leaders for reading, science, and geography and with the deputy headteacher in her capacity as the special educational needs coordinator. I also met a group of pupils. I met with the chair and two other governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I visited several phonics sessions and observed familiar adults listening to children read. I scrutinised curriculum planning in science and reviewed a selection of pupils' topic books. I looked at action plans for pupils with SEND. I checked the single central register, the record of vetting checks made on members of staff. I also considered the 32 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 53 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector