

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231  
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8 July 2022

Mrs Helen Johnson  
Headteacher  
Birkenhead Park School  
Park Road South  
Birkenhead  
Merseyside  
CH43 4UY

Dear Mrs Johnson

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Birkenhead Park School**

Following my visit to your school on 6 July 2022, 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 four successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

This was the third routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. I discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

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

**The school continues to require improvement. Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action toward the school becoming a good school.**

Leaders should take further action to:

- complete their curriculum thinking so that in all subjects, particularly in key stage 3, pupils access a curriculum where the subject content is at least as broad and ambitious as the national curriculum

- check that the curriculum is delivered consistently well across all subjects and key stages
- strengthen the support for those pupils who are in the early stages of learning to read, or who are behind with their reading, so that they catch up quickly with their peers.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection, several new staff have joined the school. This includes subject leaders, teachers and support staff. The number of pupils on roll has increased.

## **Main findings**

Since the last inspection, you have acted swiftly to strengthen leadership at all levels, including the leadership of subject curriculums. Alongside other senior leaders and governors, you are also continuing to refine your improvement priorities. This is to ensure that there is a shared understanding of exactly what is required to develop further the quality of education for pupils. You, your governors, trustees and other senior leaders are taking appropriate steps to ensure that the changes that you make to the curriculum are sustainable. For example, you have invested in appropriate resources and training for leaders and other staff to better meet pupils' learning needs.

You and other senior leaders, with the support of governors and trustees, are in the process of overhauling the structure of the curriculum, particularly in key stage 3. This is to ensure that teachers have sufficient time to teach the content of the curriculum, which you aim to be at least as broad as the national curriculum. At key stage 4, pupils now have access to a more ambitious curriculum. For example, an increasing number of pupils choose to study the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects.

Across all curriculum areas, you are ensuring that subject leaders are clear about the content that underpins the curriculum. Many subject leaders are also taking effective steps to ensure that teachers are aware of the essential knowledge that pupils must learn. In several subjects, leaders have already identified the content that pupils are expected to know, as well as the key vocabulary and concepts that they want pupils to learn. This is starting to help pupils to build upon their prior learning and deepen their knowledge of subjects over time. However, in those subjects that are further behind, leaders are still finalising exactly what pupils should know, particularly in key stage 3.

As more of the curriculum content is established, you and other leaders are focusing on improving the delivery of the curriculum. For example, you have ensured that teachers have strong subject knowledge. Pupils are benefiting from teachers' increasingly strong subject knowledge because they are remembering more of the subjects that they are learning. Despite these improvements, some subject leaders do not check consistently well that teachers are delivering the content of the curriculum as intended.

In response to the areas for improvement that were left at the previous inspection, subject leaders have redesigned their assessment systems. This is to ensure that teachers check regularly on how well pupils are learning specific knowledge. As a result of subject leaders' work, teachers are increasingly confident in establishing whether pupils have retained earlier learning. Across the school, teachers are using leaders' assessment systems increasingly well to identify with accuracy any gaps in pupils' knowledge. Leaders have ensured that the design of the curriculum allows teachers the opportunity to address misconceptions and embed learning. Pupils said that they value the improvements to the delivery of the curriculum.

At the time of the last inspection, leaders were asked to ensure that teachers received high-quality information about pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This is so that teachers could adapt the delivery of the curriculum to reflect the learning needs of this group of pupils. You, and the leaders responsible for pupils with SEND, have successfully addressed this weakness. Appropriate plans are now in place for all pupils with SEND. These plans include pertinent and individualised information, relating to these pupils' specific barriers to learning and the strategies to overcome these barriers.

The development of pupils' reading skills is a whole-school priority for you and all of your staff. The impact of staff training to develop whole-school literacy strategies, and to identify subject-specific vocabulary, is evident across all curriculum areas. It is also clear in the quality of pupils' work. You and other senior leaders have introduced a reading initiative to ensure that pupils access a range of cultural and ambitious literature and texts. Pupils talked positively about their experience of this initiative during form time.

Despite the focus on reading, on entry to the school, a larger number of pupils are behind with their reading than has been the case in the past. You have systems in place to identify these pupils and offer appropriate support, which includes access to systematic synthetic phonics, when required. While a small number of pupils currently benefit from this support, some pupils who are behind with their reading knowledge do not catch up with their peers quickly enough. Some pupils do not read as fluently or as accurately as they should.

Governors and trustees have worked closely with you and other senior leaders to address the challenges brought about by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Governors are holding leaders more fully to account for the quality of the curriculum. Staff are appreciative of your efforts to support their well-being and workload.

### **Additional support**

You have worked openly and collaboratively with trustees and a range of external partners, including the local authority, to access support and to explore ways in which you can improve the quality of education for pupils.

You, senior leaders and subject leaders have appreciated the support and advice that you have received. For example, you have taken part in local and national educational projects. You and your staff have found this support beneficial.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders and subject leaders. I also met with groups of pupils. In addition, I met with representatives of the local governing body and the trust board including the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer (CEO) for the trust. I spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone.

I discussed the curriculum with the subject leaders for English, mathematics and modern foreign languages. I met with senior leaders responsible for assessment, SEND and reading. I visited a sample of lessons and met with groups of pupils in Years 8 and 10 to discuss their experiences of school life. I reviewed samples of pupils' work. I examined a range of documentation, including the school development plan and the evaluation of the progress towards this plan. I also checked leaders' safeguarding documentation.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Downing  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**