

Serco Inspections  
Boundary House  
2 Wythall Green Way  
Middle Lane  
BIRMINGHAM  
West Midlands  
B47 6LW

**OFSTED T** 0300 123 1231  
Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Gill Ellyard  
Mill Vale  
Wilbury Drive  
Dunstable  
Bedfordshire  
LU5 4QP

Dear Mrs Ellyard

**Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Mill Vale School, Bedfordshire, LU5 4QP**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave me when I inspected your school on 6 October 2010 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the staff, pupils, governors and the local authority representatives for their help during the inspection.

Since the school was last inspected, there have been significant changes to staffing. Five teachers left at the end of summer term. Consequently, the school has undertaken an internal review and restructuring of staffing. A new middle management team of five has been appointed and they took up their posts in September 2010. The headteacher took up her post in September 2010. The number of classes has reduced by one due to falling numbers on roll.

As a result of the inspection in May 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making **inadequate** progress in addressing most of the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement. The school has responded well to ensuring that arrangements for safeguarding are now robust and meet statutory requirements. The school has developed a systematic and committed approach to promoting equality of opportunity and community cohesion although the impact of these is not yet fully evident. However, provision for a small group of newly arrived pupils who are at early stages of learning English is inadequate.

Teachers' assessments and the provisional end of Key Stage 2 test results in mathematics confirmed that pupils' attainment has declined and is now below average. An average proportion of pupils in Year 6 attained the expected age-related levels in English although boys' writing has not improved. Lesson observations

undertaken jointly with the headteacher, work in pupils' books and the school's own tracking information show that a significant minority of pupils continue to make inadequate progress in mathematics but satisfactory progress in English.

Teachers have received training to enable them to use assessment information more accurately to meet the individual needs of pupils. Lesson observations indicated that this practice remains variable. Work given to pupils in some lessons still does not provide sufficient challenge particularly for the more able. Teachers are not clear about what they want pupils to learn and therefore, neither are pupils.

Consequently, teachers are unable to monitor pupils' progress or to correct any misconceptions that occur. The involvement of pupils in being able to assess their own work is not yet developed in day-to-day practice. The headteacher and the local authority are aware that improving the use of assessment to accelerate learning remains an important area of development.

Monitoring of teaching undertaken by the headteacher, supported by the local authority reviews at the end of summer term, identified some improvement in teaching although 20 percent of the teaching observed remained inadequate. Lesson observations this term, including those conducted during the inspection, confirmed that teaching is continuing to improve. However, a small minority of teaching remains inadequate. Teachers still do not have consistent approaches to using assessment information to inform lesson planning or setting learning objectives. This means that pupils' differing needs are not fully met. Many pupils still have gaps in their knowledge and understanding which hold them back when applying their skills. In a very small number of lessons seen, there is a busy working atmosphere, with pupils applying themselves well to the activities planned to meet their individual needs. In these lessons, teachers use a more creative and flexible approaches to the curriculum to ensure that pupil's individual needs are being met. This approach is showing some promising results. For example, teacher assessment is accurate and enables them to set realistic targets for pupils. Pupils enjoy their learning and are clear what they need to do to meet their targets. Teachers' marking and comments offer advice for improvement. This practice however, is not consistent across the school.

The school has taken effective action to improve behaviour and to establish good relationships between teachers and pupils. In the lessons observed, pupils showed positive attitudes to learning. They worked well together when given the opportunity and showed maturity in moving around the classroom and around the school. Pupils commented positively on these improvements in relationships but felt that there were still some teachers who shouted at them in some lessons. The school has established a 'one-stop shop' where pupils with a range of personal, social, emotional and behavioural needs are supported well by dedicated staff.

The headteacher is dedicated and has worked hard to stabilise staffing. She has undertaken a review of staffing during a difficult period. She has begun to establish a strong sense of teamwork with the middle leaders and morale is buoyant with a

'can do' attitude. She has introduced a regular monitoring cycle of lesson observation which is beginning to raise awareness of the quality of teaching. Middle leaders are beginning to take an increasingly important role in supporting the improvement initiatives that have been recently introduced. However, these have not yet had sufficient time to embed and raise pupils' overall achievement. The governing body is also playing an increasingly active role in supporting the school. It has been instrumental in supporting the headteacher in the school's recent work to reorganise and restructure the staff.

The local authority has provided the school with a satisfactory level of support following Ofsted's decision to place it in a category of concern. The school improvement adviser and his team have worked closely with the headteacher and the governing body to offer support and guidance. Appropriate training to a range of staff particularly the middle leadership team has helped them to play a greater role in managing and developing their areas of responsibility. However, much of this work has not had sufficient time to embed or have a positive impact on raising pupils' achievement. The local authority recognises that its development plan, which required amendments following evaluation by Her Majesty's Inspector needs to be in line with that of the school and is therefore currently reviewing this.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rashida Sharif  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **As a result of the inspection in May 2010, the school was asked to:**

- Improve the rate of pupils' learning and progress by:
  - maintain an unrelenting drive to raise attainment in Years 5 and 6, particularly in boys' writing
  - increasing the level of challenge in lessons for higher ability and gifted and talented pupils
  
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching by:
  - ensuring that by end of July, all teachers use assessment to plan activities which build on -what pupils have already achieved
  - developing strategies for increasing pupils' engagement in lessons.
  
- Develop the role of head of department by:
  - setting, within the next two months, much clearer and higher expectations of middle managers, especially for planning, monitoring and evaluation
  - creating a more relevant and exciting curriculum for their subjects.
  
- Develop a more systematic and committed approach to promoting equality of opportunity and community cohesion and ensure national requirements are met.
  
- Ensure, within a month, that arrangements for safeguarding are robust and meet statutory requirements.