

Serco Inspections
Cedar House
21 William Street
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 1LH

Ofsted
T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Serco E tim.ogbourn@serco.com
Direct T 0121 683 3888



10 March 2011

Mr John Bates
Headteacher
Bleakhouse Junior School
Bleakhouse Road
Oldbury
B68 9DS

Dear Mr Bates

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Bleakhouse Junior School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 9 March 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the staff and the members of the governing body for their time and courtesy. I would particularly like to thank the pupils for the most enjoyable time I spent talking to them.

Since the last inspection, there have been a number of staff changes. In particular, there are newly recruited subject leaders for English and science. There has also been a change of responsibilities on the senior leadership team, which now includes a coordinator for community cohesion.

As a result of the inspection on 7–8 December 2009, 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 has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Although attainment remains low, there are early signs of improvement, particularly in science and mathematics. In the most recent 2010 test results for English and mathematics, attainment at the end of Year 6 was below the national average. However, the school's data and work in pupils' books indicate that current attainment in Year 6 is beginning to improve. This rise in attainment is a result of actions taken to improve the quality and consistency of teaching. Lessons observed jointly with senior leaders confirm that most pupils are making at least satisfactory progress, and it is sometimes good. Leaders carefully monitor pupils' progress and

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where it has been identified as inconsistent, appropriate action has been taken to accelerate pupils' rate of learning.

Pupils speak enthusiastically about their learning in science, and the science lessons observed were consistently good. Pupils are taught suitable methods to plan their own investigations. In a Year 5 mathematics lesson, pupils devised methods to collect their own data which they analysed accurately, making good use of their mental mathematics skills. Work in pupils' books shows that there is an increasing emphasis on practical work and problem solving, with the best lessons well matched to pupils' abilities. However, the level of challenge for the most-able pupils is not always high enough; as a result, not enough pupils attain the highest levels. In weaker lessons, opportunities were missed by teachers to correct pupils' misconceptions. In some classes, teachers' expectations of standards of pupils' handwriting and presentation are too low.

The success of improvement initiatives is the result of greater responsibility taken on by the school's middle leaders. They have been trained in lesson observations and monitoring techniques; as a result, these leaders are able to hold others to account for pupils' progress and standards. Teachers work in pairs to observe one another and learn from each other's good practice. This has improved the consistency of good quality teaching and learning across the school. Senior leaders are assiduous in monitoring the quality of lessons and teachers' planning, and provide teachers with detailed developmental feedback on how to improve their work. This is resulting in pupils' accelerated progress.

More opportunities have been provided for pupils to learn about other faiths and cultures, through whole-school theme weeks and the school's links with the Kachelle Centre in Zambia. The newly appointed coordinator also has plans to forge a link with a local school.

The school has received good and efficient support from the local authority, through the School Improvement Partner. In particular, consultancy work has improved the consistency of teaching. Good quality support and challenge has been given to the school's senior leaders in their drive to eradicate inadequate teaching and raise standards through pupils' accelerated progress. The governing body have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have become more confident at analysing and questioning the school's performance, and this is enabling them to hold the school to account more rigorously.

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

Fiona Arnison
Additional Inspector

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Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2009

- Raise standards in mathematics and science by:
 - giving pupils better guidance on how to tackle problem-solving tasks
 - providing more open-ended challenges to enable more-able pupils to attain the high standards of which they are capable.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - giving teachers clear guidance on how to improve their work
 - providing more opportunities to learn from the best teachers in school
 - monitoring the progress of pupils in individual classes more rigorously.

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to learn about the diversity of faiths and cultures in the United Kingdom and across the world.