

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
Direct T 0121 683 3888



16 June 2011

Ms Joanne Brown
Towcester Church of England Primary School
Islington Road
Towcester
NN12 6AU

Dear Ms Brown

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Towcester Church of England Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 15 June 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. I was also grateful for the co-operation of staff and pupils during the inspection and the welcome that they gave my colleague Barney Todd and me. Please pass on my thanks to them.

Since the last inspection, one new teacher has been appointed and the headteacher has left to take up another appointment. At the time of our visit, the deputy headteacher was acting headteacher. There are currently no mixed-age classes.

As a result of the inspection on 19 January 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 has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

In the past, pupils' progress has been slow, and attainment below expected levels. However, over this year, progress has accelerated and there is emerging evidence that, whilst still below expected levels, attainment is improving, especially in mathematics and science. In Key Stage 1, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected level for their age in reading, writing and mathematics is average, but few are exceeding this. In Key Stage 2, attainment had been low in 2009-2010, especially in mathematics, but recently the school has put in place very effective strategies to address this underachievement and these are beginning to have a positive impact on attainment. School data, confirmed by inspection evidence, indicates that in spite of variations across Key Stage 2 in mathematics and science, the trend is an improving one. Achievement in the current Year 6 in mathematics and science is considerably better than in previous years.

September 2010



A key factor in the emerging success of the school in tackling underachievement is the impact of its drive to improve the quality and consistency of teaching. Records of lesson observations are detailed, evaluative and show an improving trend in teaching, a judgement that this inspector agrees with. A common strength in teaching is the clear and imaginative planning which meets the pupils' wide-ranging needs. Pupils' learning is being carefully evaluated and the outcomes are taken into account when planning future lessons. Pupils are involved in assessing their own and each other's work and assessment systems are being used more effectively to ensure greater levels of challenge and support. Pupils say that they enjoy their learning more now that there is a greater emphasis on using and applying their knowledge in mathematics to solve problems and on developing skills in investigation and discovery in science. For example, in an outstanding Year 6 science lesson, pupils were totally engrossed in solving the problem of how to separate sand, salt, paperclips and marbles in a mixture without touching these materials. Where teaching is less effective, the pace is too slow so that not all pupils are fully engaged in their learning.

The school is going through a period of change, but the acting headteacher, assistant headteacher and the governing body are successfully managing the transition between permanent headteachers. A particular strength is the commitment across the whole school to drive improvement, and changes in leadership have not interrupted this process. Middle managers are rigorously monitoring and accurately evaluating new initiatives, for example in sharing good practice following whole school mathematics investigation days. As a result, they are having a more positive impact on addressing previous weaknesses and there are secure indications of 'green shoots' of improvement, although the school recognises that these need further embedding. There is a common understanding of what needs to be developed further and well-conceived plans are in place to achieve this. Consequently, the school has a good capacity to build upon its early successes in addressing underachievement.

The school has received a satisfactory level of support and monitoring from the local authority, and this has helped identify clear targets for improvement and evaluate the progress that the school is making towards achieving them.

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

Christopher Nye
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2010

- Accelerate progress and raise attainment in mathematics and science in Key Stage 2 by:
 - consistent teaching of key skills, particularly in science topics
 - giving pupils experience of problem-solving in which to apply their numerical and scientific skills.

- Ensure that teaching is consistently good or better by:
 - more effective use of information on pupils' prior attainment by teachers to plan lessons to challenge all groups, especially in the mixed-age classes
 - sharing examples of best practice across all staff
 - basing the teaching of science on a more consistent use of teachers' day-to-day records of what pupils have learnt.

- Increase the impact of school monitoring and evaluation so that middle leaders evaluate initiatives more rigorously and act to remedy weaknesses.