

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

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

Serco
Direct T 0121 683 3888



20 January 2012

Mrs A Blant
Headteacher
Pitsea Junior School
High Road
Pitsea
Basildon
SS13 3AB

Dear Mrs Blant

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Pitsea Junior School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19 January 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils, members of the governing body and the local authority representative for answering my questions so patiently.

Since the previous inspection, the school has appointed a deputy headteacher, who took up her post in January 2012 and will be free from class teaching commitments until July. The school has also employed two new key workers to support children with specific needs and a play leader to promote play activities and to support children at lunchtimes. In September 2011, the above-average proportion of pupils in the school with special educational needs and/or disabilities increased further. This is because nearly half of the pupils in Year 3 have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

As a result of the inspection on 6 July 2011, 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 good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Pupils are making better progress in English and mathematics than they were at the time of the last inspection. In reading and mathematics, their progress is faster than average, and this is helping to close the gap between their attainment and age-related expectations. In the autumn term, pupils' progress in writing improved to match the expected rate. While further improvements are already evident this term, pupils' attainment in writing remains below average. The progress made by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities has also improved, reflecting the very wide range of support and intervention programmes provided by the school.

A major issue for the school, and one that makes it vulnerable to being judged inadequate, is that pupils' low attainment on entry is not fully reflected in value-added calculations. More than a third of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including many with moderate learning difficulties and/or developmental delay. Some pupils are effectively unable to read and others are not used to speaking in sentences, and this hinders their ability to plan what they want to write. The school has introduced a baseline assessment early in Year 3, covering literacy, numeracy and non-verbal reasoning. The results, which have been validated by the local authority, confirm pupils' below average attainment.

Attendance has risen further since the last inspection. It reflects pupils' enjoyment of school and the school's good engagement with parents and carers. Pupils' behaviour during this visit was good, both around the school and in the lessons and support sessions observed. The school has a good track record of securing improvements in behaviour for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, including those transferring in from other schools.

Extensive training has ensured that all teachers and teaching assistants are well versed in teaching phonics; the benefits are evident in pupils' improved progress in reading. More recently, the professional development focus has switched to the teaching of writing, which now promotes the specific skills that different pupils need to help them move forward. For example, in a well taught literacy lesson, the teacher worked with pupils who needed help to think through what would happen in their stories and to convey this in sentences; the teaching assistant worked with pupils who were trying to use more imaginative vocabulary. Meanwhile, other groups of pupils each had a challenge set for them, for example to include more complex punctuation or to use adjectival clauses.

Improvements in pupils' writing have also been promoted through enhancements to the curriculum. For example, on 'Witchsea Junior School' day, pupils were met by staff dressed as witches, ready to take them to 'witch school'. This flight of imagination inspired many pupils to write more extensively and with wider vocabulary than ever before. Another themed day was linked to the Second World War, with a buried object to find, stories about evacuation and a writing task where pupils explained how to construct an Anderson shelter. The school is committed to providing each pupil with rich experiences, including visits and visitors, every term.

The curriculum has been amended in other ways. For example, the lowest attaining pupils are no longer taught literacy and mathematics in separate sets, allowing them to learn from working alongside pupils at a higher level. Part of each day is now allocated to 'primary skills', bringing together a range of interventions with different groups, although this is still in an early stage of development. A session is allocated each week to ensure that pupils have enough time to follow the guidance they have been given on improving their work. The school has invested in additional laptops and a new computer-based learning package to support the teaching of phonics and spelling.

Mathematics teaching now places more emphasis on using and applying mathematics, as in a Year 5/6 lesson, where pupils generated their own questions about real data sets. Although this task proved quite difficult, some problem-solving tasks are too easy. For example, the first dozen word problems in a Year 3/4 lesson required pupils to subtract the second number from the first; some pupils were able to get the right numerical answers without reading the questions. Teachers and teaching assistants make good use of learning resources to help develop pupils' understanding of number. For example, Year 3 pupils who could already subtract with the aid of a number line used tens and units blocks to help them make sense of an alternative approach to subtraction. Pupils with special educational needs used abacuses to support their counting in twos as they learned about doubling and halving.

The quality of assessment has improved markedly in literacy, and there is increasing evidence of marking for literacy in pupils' writing for other subjects, such as history. Marking now gives pupils more specific guidance on how to improve. Pupils respond in green ink, so the improvements can easily be seen. In mathematics, some opportunities are missed for diagnostic marking and checks on pupils as they work that might pinpoint errors and misconceptions. Teachers understand the value of observing pupils during handwriting practice, to see how they form their letters.

Every child has an individual provision map, shared with their parents or carers, that sets out the support and enrichment they are receiving. The school also maintains centralised assessment records that are updated each term. These allow school leaders to analyse the progress of individuals and groups of pupils. During the autumn term, each teacher has been observed at least twice by the headteacher, and subject coordinators have also scrutinised pupils' work. This effective monitoring, supplemented by a skills audit, has informed the school's professional development planning, which has attracted a good response from staff. The new deputy headteacher is already closely involved in lesson observation and checks on planning. Members of the governing body observe the school's work regularly. They have a clear understanding of the school's data and the value-added issue.

The local authority's statement of action sets out the effective support it is providing, which has sensibly been spread out to avoid overwhelming the small teaching team. Staff have received valuable support from other successful schools.

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

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2011

- Raise pupils' attainment and accelerate their progress, especially in writing by:
 - providing inspirational curricular experiences that capture all pupils' interest and motivate them to write confidently
 - increasing pupils' application of writing skills through a greater knowledge of spelling, grammar and ability to write in a fluent handwriting style.
- By April 2012, improve the quality of assessment, especially the feedback to pupils by:
 - ensuring that marking in pupils' books enables them to understand easily what they have done well and what they need to do to improve
 - making better use of pupils' targets to help them know what to do to attain the next level.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that most lessons are consistently good or better by July 2012. In particular, ensure that all staff:
 - use a variety of teaching strategies which enthuse pupils so they are fully engaged in their learning
 - use their knowledge of pupils' prior learning when planning for what they need to learn next
 - ensure teaching assistants are more actively engaged in supporting pupils' learning, including in small group work
 - provide more opportunities for pupils to work in groups to solve problems.