

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

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk **Serco**
www.ofsted.gov.uk **Direct T** 0121 683 3888

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Mr R Fletcher
Headteacher
Fordbridge Community Primary School
Yorklea Croft
Chelmsley Wood
Birmingham
B37 5EG

Dear Mr Fletcher

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Fordbridge Community Primary School

Following my visit with Phillip Minns, Additional Inspector, to your school on 20–21 June 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2012. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Solihull.

Yours sincerely

Usha Devi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2012

- Improve the quality of teaching so that a high proportion is good or better by:
 - ensuring that all lessons have clear and measurable objectives and that activities contain more learning opportunities
 - devising a questioning strategy to be used consistently by adults to ensure that all pupils respond to an appropriately challenging question in each lesson
 - ensuring that teachers check carefully during and at the end of all lessons that pupils have understood the work and this feedback is used to plan subsequent learning.

- Raise Key Stage 2 attainment in English and mathematics so that Year 6 pupils exceed the national average, especially in reading.

- Improve leadership and management throughout the school by:
 - ensuring that action planning at all levels has a few key priorities with measurable success criteria that are focused on improving outcomes for pupils
 - review the management structure to ensure that all post holders are held to account for raising standards
 - improve the leadership of special education needs provision to ensure that all pupils on the special educational needs register have clear targets and appropriate support to achieve them.

Special measures: monitoring of Fordbridge Community Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 20–21 June 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, consultant headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, a group of pupils, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the inspection of January 2012, the school has experienced high levels of staff absence. During this monitoring inspection, four class teachers were absent due to ill health. Three middle leaders have taken responsibility for leading developments in the curriculum, special educational needs and reading in Key Stage 2. As part of the local authority support arrangements, a consultant headteacher has been appointed to provide support for the headteacher. She works at the school three days a week.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Attainment remains below that expected, especially in writing and mathematics. In these subjects, the gap between attainment of pupils in the school and pupils nationally is not closing quickly enough. Work in pupils' books show that weaknesses remain in punctuation, sentence structure, spelling, and basic number facts.

Some improvements are evident. Appropriate action has been taken to raise achievement in reading and to encourage pupils to read for enjoyment. For instance, the school has purchased new books and introduced a more consistent approach to the teaching of letters and sounds (phonics). Teachers are also placing a greater emphasis on helping pupils become fluent readers. As a result, reading standards are steadily rising and pupils are making broadly satisfactory progress in reading. Pupils are becoming more confident at using a range of strategies to read unfamiliar words, and say that they enjoy reading. This is especially the case in Year 6. However, independent activities during 'guided reading' sessions are not always sufficiently focused on addressing gaps in pupils' literacy skills.

Evidence from lesson observations indicates that overall progress in each year group is inadequate. Although pupils sometimes make satisfactory and, occasionally, good progress, in too many lessons pupils do not make enough progress. This is because of persistent weaknesses in teaching. Pupils of all abilities, including those with disabilities and special educational needs, are capable of reaching higher standards and making better progress.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- raise Key Stage 2 attainment in English and mathematics so that Year 6 pupils exceed the national average, especially in reading – inadequate.

The quality of teaching

Teachers throughout the school have received suitable training, support and advice from the local authority, the headteacher and the consultant headteacher. Despite this input, the overall quality of teaching remains inadequate. Over half of the lessons seen by inspectors were inadequate. In Key Stages 1 and 2, the quality of teaching ranged from good to inadequate. It was inadequate in the Early Years Foundation Stage. During discussions with inspectors, some teachers were keen to explore how they could improve their practice.

In one effective Year 4 lesson, the teacher provided pupils with suitably challenging activities. The teacher also asked challenging questions in order to encourage pupils to select phrases which would add the most impact to their poster. In satisfactory lessons, learning does not move on quickly enough because activities are not always well matched to the pupils' different learning needs.

In the majority of lessons, pupils make inadequate progress because the pace of learning is slow. Teachers talk for too long and this reduces the time available for pupils to learn independently. Part way during lessons, teachers stop pupils to repeat what they have already said during the introduction. Not enough teachers use this time to assess how well pupils are learning, clarify any misconceptions pupils may have or to adjust activities. Assessment information is not always used well to plan activities for pupils of different abilities. Moreover, planning often focuses on what pupils will do rather than what they are expected to learn during the lesson. Some lessons are characterised by low expectations. In these lessons, more-able pupils are asked to produce a greater amount of work than their peers instead of completing activities that will build on what they already know. Similarly, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are provided with activities that are too easy. Teachers' marking is inconsistent. Pupils do not always receive the precise feedback they need to improve their work.

This monitoring inspection has highlighted significant concerns about the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation stage. Planning is poor. It does not clearly specify how children will develop skills and knowledge in all six areas of learning or how the needs of children with different learning needs will be met. Adult-led activities are not always sufficiently challenging or interesting. The activities that children can choose for themselves often lack purpose and do not always enable children to learn new skills. Staff regularly miss opportunities to develop children's language, and often accept short responses to their questions.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- improve the quality of teaching so that a high proportion is good or better – inadequate.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour continues to be satisfactory in lessons and around school. The curriculum is becoming more relevant and interesting for pupils. As a consequence, pupils are showing more positive attitudes to learning. However, in too many lessons, they have to sit and listen for too long. When this happens, they lose interest and become distracted. Attendance remains in line with the national average for primary schools. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe and that staff listen to their concerns.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and consultant headteacher work together well. They have introduced a suitable system for recording outcomes from monitoring and have used this to accurately identify the school's strengths and weaknesses. The headteacher is taking appropriate action to address weaknesses in teaching. In partnership with the local authority, individual staff have been provided with tailored support. Since the inspection of January 2012, the school has experienced high levels of staff absence. This, coupled with lack of strong leadership at other levels, has slowed the pace of improvement.

The staffing structure is rightly under review. There is a large number of senior leaders in the school. Many of them have roles and responsibilities which are not aligned with the school's most pressing priorities. In contrast, middle leaders, with effective support from the local authority, are increasingly taking responsibility for leading developments which are closely linked to the school's key areas for improvement.

Monitoring and evaluation are inadequate. The deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers regularly check teachers' planning, review pupils' work and provide teachers with formal and informal feedback. However, their feedback is not sufficiently focused on accelerating progress and improving the quality of teaching. Moreover, they do not clearly specify when they will check if agreed actions have been implemented. Action plans have been revised and focus on the actions that will be taken to accelerate progress and improve the quality of teaching. However, success criteria are not sufficiently measurable.

Despite suitable support from local authority advisers, the headteacher and the consultant headteacher, not all senior leaders have been able to demonstrate that they have the skills required to lead improvements in the school with a sufficient

sense of urgency or rigour. As a result of this monitoring inspection, the headteacher and consultant headteacher are planning to more rigorously hold senior leaders to account for their work and to more frequently check the quality of teaching and learning in order to secure more rapid improvements in pupils' progress.

Pupils' assessment data is regularly collated. This data is being used to identify pupils who are underachieving. However, there is no systematic approach toward analysing this data. As a consequence, senior leaders are unable to evaluate if the actions they are taking are having the necessary impact on pupils' progress. Moreover, there is no shared understanding among senior leaders about pupils' performance. The headteacher acknowledges that not all of the assessment data is reliable. There are plans to check the accuracy of this data.

The leadership of special educational needs has been strengthened. The newly appointed middle leader has reviewed the individual targets of pupils who are disabled and have special educational needs to ensure that they are appropriate. There is a range of appropriate interventions but it is too soon to measure their impact. Class teachers are not yet fully held to account for the progress of this group of pupils.

The governing body is supportive of the school. Members have attended training and, consequently, have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Nevertheless, they are not regularly checking how well the school is addressing its weaknesses. Moreover, there is still a long way to go before the governing body is able to fulfil its responsibilities and hold all members of the senior leadership to account.

A deputy headteacher and a middle leader have started to make suitable changes to the curriculum. They have identified the skills that pupils in each year group need to learn in subjects such as history and geography. Staff are beginning to make links between subjects. These are all positive developments and are helping to make the curriculum more interesting and relevant for pupils.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection:

- improve leadership and management throughout the school – inadequate.

External support

The local authority statement of action is fit for purpose. The local authority's review of teaching and learning is accurate and the recommendations for the school are appropriate. Advisers and consultants have provided a suitable programme of support for senior leaders, teachers and the governing body. In spite of this, their impact has been limited.

The headteacher, consultant headteacher and local authority acknowledge the imminent challenge for the school is to eradicate inadequate teaching and strengthen leadership and management, including governance.