

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

Direct T 0121 683 3291
Direct email: tim.ogbourn@serco.com



4 October 2012

Mrs Bozena Laraway
Executive Headteacher
Cherry Tree Primary School
Church Road
Basildon
SS16 4AG

Dear Mrs Laraway

Special measures monitoring inspection of Cherry Tree Primary School, Basildon

Following my visit with Edgar Hastings, Additional Inspector, to your school on 2–3 October 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures. Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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 Essex.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching in order to accelerate pupils' progress in mathematics by:
 - introducing a rigorous programme to develop the subject knowledge and expertise of staff in teaching mathematics and monitoring its impact
 - planning opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills effectively across all subjects
 - consistently challenging the more able pupils so that they achieve to the best of their ability
 - providing more helpful comments to pupils through the marking of their work on the steps they need to take to meet their targets.
- Improve the teaching of phonics and accelerate the development of pupils' early reading skills by:
 - ensuring that phonics tasks and materials are well-matched to pupils' skills and capabilities
 - ensuring that each lesson focuses more sharply on the next stages in learning for all pupils.
- Improve behaviour in lessons and around the school by:
 - involving staff, pupils, the governing body, parents and carers in reviewing the behaviour policy so there is a shared and common understanding of principles and procedures
 - setting clear and consistent expectations in classrooms for pupils' behaviour
 - providing training and guidance for all staff in the implementation of procedures for behaviour management.
- Build the school's leadership capacity and impact by:
 - sharpening the accuracy of school self-evaluation
 - ensuring that planning to tackle key priorities is based on challenging targets for improving the pupils' achievement
 - developing the role played by the governing body in holding the school to account.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 2-3 October 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, groups of pupils, teachers and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the last inspection, the headteacher and deputy headteachers have resigned. There is a new Chair of the Governing Body. A new deputy headteacher took up her post in April and a new executive headteacher, working at the school four days a week, began her role on 1 September. The new leaders of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 have been in post since the start of this term. Eight teachers have left the school since the inspection. Since the inspection, all leaders and managers and the majority of teachers have changed.

Achievement of pupils at the school

In most lessons observed by inspectors, the rate of learning was good. Since the last inspection, teachers have developed a clear understanding of how the achievement of their pupils compares with national expectations. In Key Stage 2, pupils' ability in mathematics is below where it should be, but effective teaching since the beginning of this term is bringing about rapid improvement.

In 2011, attainment at Level 4 was below average in English and well- below average in mathematics. Improved teaching and effective interventions ensured that in the summer 2012 national tests, there was a sharp rise in the proportion of pupils attaining Level 4 in English. The overwhelming majority of pupils reached national expectations in this subject and nearly one third reached Level 5, which was another sharp rise. Pupils do particularly well in writing. In mathematics, attainment at Level 4 declined further, although at Level 5 there was a sharp increase, closing the gap with the national average.

The proportion of pupils making expected progress in English between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is above average but remains below average in mathematics. As a result of the poor performance in mathematics, the proportion of pupils gaining Level 4 in both subjects has risen only marginally. The school met all its targets, raising a question as to whether these targets were sufficiently challenging. In the Early Years Foundation Stage pupils' achievement fell in 2012 but is now improving.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved markedly through a combination of staff development and staff turnover. Most teaching seen during the monitoring visit was good with none that was inadequate. Teachers are clear about what is expected of them and their pupils. There is now a good level of consistency in classroom practice. Lessons are now characterised by clear objectives, which are shared with pupils, and a good pace of activity. Teaching assistants have been reassigned from duties outside the classroom to supporting pupils' learning directly in lessons. Their effectiveness in this is variable.

The teaching of mathematics has improved. Teachers are more confident in how to teach the subject effectively. As a result, pupils are able, for example, to describe and understand different approaches to subtraction, and good instances were observed where teachers carefully built on pupils' different levels of understanding of various ways of subtracting. Several effective examples of pupils devising strategies to solve mathematical problems were observed. However, across the wider curriculum, there are more opportunities to develop literacy than mathematical skills. The marked improvement in Level 5 mathematics results suggests that higher attaining pupils have responded well to greater challenge.

Pupils regularly receive feedback on their work, including through regular marking. This is always encouraging to pupils and often, but not always, indicates their next steps. Currently, pupils do not receive consistently precise feedback that enables them to improve their performance. Some examples were seen of pupils being actively involved in assessing their own work, but this was underdeveloped.

All teachers, apart from two newly appointed staff, have been trained in the teaching of letters and sounds (phonics). Training by the local authority for teaching assistants continues. There are now much better daily phonics sessions in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1. Lessons are now designed to meet the needs of pupils of differing abilities.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is thought by pupils and teachers to be the area that has improved the most in the past six months. Now, behaviour seen around the school is calm and courteous. Pupils conduct themselves maturely in social spaces and they have good relationships with each other and with members of staff. All teachers create a purposeful culture for learning and pupils respond appropriately.

Teachers and pupils comment that there is a clear policy for behaviour, understood by everyone and implemented consistently across the school. Classroom management by teachers is very secure. The fall in exclusions is dramatic. In the past the number of exclusions was very concerning, but so far this term there have

been none. 'We have better strategies now' was the school's explanation. This includes better working with parents and external agencies.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Perhaps the best evidence of improved leadership comes from the comments of pupils to inspectors about how the school has improved. One pupil summed it up, 'I think the school is amazingly improved.' Another added, 'I didn't like it much, but now it's so much better.' The leadership of the school at all levels has completely changed since the inspection. Leaders now know the school's strengths and areas for development. The executive headteacher and lead inspector were in complete agreement in judging the quality of the five lessons observed together. Teachers speak very positively about now having a clear sense of direction. The executive headteacher brings valuable experience of school improvement and in her short time at the school has made significant improvements to routines and the general level of professionalism, for example, the introduction of a staff dress code. The focus is clearly on learning so, for example, the practice of Year 6 monitors missing lessons to carry messages has been stopped, so that children's learning is uninterrupted.

The deputy headteacher proved effective at driving school improvement during the summer term. This term she is teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage where she has led good improvements to the provision.

At the time of the inspection, the governing body was insufficiently well-informed to carry out its statutory functions in holding the school to account. There have been significant changes to the governing body and it is now beginning to fulfil a more limited role while some powers have returned to the local authority.

The large number of pupils entitled to free school meals has resulted in the school receiving substantial extra funding through the pupil premium. The school is not clear how this money has been used to bring about improved achievement. A priority for the new leadership is to re-direct funding to maximise the impact of resources on raising achievement. The complex arrangement around the leadership of provision for special educational needs is being simplified.

External support

The local authority's statement of action is clear. It was judged by Ofsted to be 'fit for purpose'. It explains why it has withdrawn the governing body's delegated budgetary powers. The local authority's recognition of the school as a cause for concern preceded the Ofsted inspection but it argues that its ability to challenge the school was blocked by the governing body and school leaders. Since the inspection, local authority advisers have worked successfully to develop teachers' skills and to

assist middle leaders, for example, in the promotion and teaching of letters and sounds. A National Leader of Education was identified by the local authority to provide support and since the start of this term she has become the executive headteacher. The local authority's vital contribution since the last inspection has been to ensure a smooth and speedy transition between headteachers and ensure that highly effective leadership was identified and put in place quickly. The appointment of an executive headteacher from a local school has the added advantage of increasing partnership opportunities.

Prior to the school being placed in special measures, three newly qualified teachers were recruited to begin work in September. In addition to support in school, they receive additional formal mentoring from a headteacher in a near-by school and from local authority representatives. At this early stage this seems to be successful, but their progress will be monitored on each visit by HMI.