

Serco Inspections
Cedar House
21 William Street T 0300 123 1231
Edgbaston Text Phone: 0161 6188524
Birmingham enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
B15 1LH www.ofsted.gov.uk **Direct T** 0121 683 3259
Direct email: lisa.parkes@serco.com



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Adrian Pembleton
Headteacher
Caslon Primary School
Beeches View Avenue
Halesowen
B63 2ES

Dear Mr Pembleton

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Caslon Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 11 September 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the pupils, staff and the local authority representative who met with me.

As a result of the inspection on 25 and 26 January 2012, 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 satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

School leaders, in partnership with staff and the local authority have halted the decline in pupils' achievement. A higher proportion of pupils are making good progress than at the time of the previous inspection. In general pupils in Years 1, 2 and 6 are making accelerated progress. Faster rates of progress in these year groups are successfully enabling many pupils to make up for previous underachievement. For instance, the unvalidated results of the Year 6 national tests show that attainment has markedly improved, with the very large majority of pupils reaching the standards expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. In other year groups, progress is not as rapid and standards remain low.

Senior leaders acknowledge there is more to be done to ensure pupils in all year groups make even better progress and reach higher standards. Their actions to improve English have been particularly effective. Pupils now have opportunities to read regularly, write at length and edit their work. Teachers are making effective use of marking and feedback to identify spelling and punctuation errors. This is helping pupils to improve their work. Writing activities are usually exciting and motivate the pupils. For example, Year 6 pupils were set the task of applying for a job as a secret

agent. The pupils spoke enthusiastically about the importance of using persuasive language in their application. Improvements are evident in pupils' handwriting because of a whole-school policy on what is expected. Pupils are writing more fluently and taking great pride in how they present their work.

Improvements in mathematics are not as strong as those seen in English. The school has implemented a whole-school approach for teaching calculations and staff are increasingly providing more varied activities which encourage pupils to use and apply their calculation skills. Nevertheless, older pupils explained that teachers do not always check what they already know in mathematics. As a result, activities are not consistently as challenging as they could be. A review of pupils' work confirms this to be the case. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to apply and develop their mathematical skills in other subjects.

Teachers have benefited from support and targeted professional development from senior leaders and external consultants. School monitoring indicates that the proportion of good or better teaching has increased since the last inspection. However, observations during the inspection and a review of pupils' work confirm that there is not enough consistently good and better teaching. This uneven provision is leading to variations between the standards attained by pupils in different year groups and subjects. Senior leaders have appropriate plans in place to extend opportunities for teachers to share existing good practice.

Teachers make reference to pupils' assessment information in their planning. Nevertheless, this information is not always used to ensure lesson activities are matched to the needs of pupils of different abilities. Occasionally, teachers miss opportunities to check how well pupils are learning during the lesson, and to adjust activities accordingly. Consequently, pupils spend too long completing activities that are too easy. This is particularly the case for more-able pupils.

Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to review and assess their own and each other's learning. Pupils told the inspector that they particularly like the 'confidence ladder' because it is a good way of letting their teachers know how well they have worked and if they need further support. Frequent discussions about individual targets successfully enable pupils to identify the next steps towards achieving their targets.

The headteacher's and deputy headteacher's accurate understanding of the actions that need to be taken to continue tackling underachievement is reflected in what has been done to address the variations between the standards attained by pupils across the school. For example, the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders have been reviewed and reorganised. With support from the headteacher and deputy headteacher, middle leaders are increasingly involved in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning in the year groups for which they are responsible. This is a recent development in the school, and the impact of middle leaders on the quality of teaching and learning in all classes has yet to be fully realised.

Senior leaders have given teachers more responsibility for checking pupils' learning and assessments. For instance, senior leaders and class teachers meet each half term to discuss the achievement of all pupils, identify the pupils who are at risk of underachieving and to agree the actions that will be taken. School staff meet regularly to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments. However, these assessments do not always reflect accurately the quality of work in pupils' books.

School leaders have effectively improved the school's planning process. The school improvement plan contains clear milestones and identifies who will manage, monitor and evaluate pupils' progress and teachers' performance. This plan is supplemented by an action plan which uses information from the analysis of assessment information and monitoring to prioritise actions that need to be taken each term.

The statement of action written by the local authority meets requirements. The local authority and external consultants are providing the school with a suitable level of support. This is helping teachers and senior leaders to develop and improve their practice. The local authority monitoring report which monitors and evaluates progress against the areas for improvement is accurate and contains helpful advice to the school.

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

Usha Devi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise pupils' achievement consistently across the school in English and mathematics by:
 - providing opportunities for pupils to read and write more extensively to improve their core literacy skills
 - providing more opportunities for pupils, particularly in Key Stage 2, to edit their work and improve the accuracy of their handwriting, spelling and punctuation
 - building on the good start children make learning letters and sounds in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 to sustain the rise in attainment in reading and writing in all classes
 - providing pupils with opportunities in all lessons to use and apply calculation skills to more challenging and varied problem solving tasks in mathematics lessons.

- Improve teaching in order to accelerate the pace of learning and sustain a rise in pupils' attainment by:
 - ensuring that teachers use assessments of pupils' progress more robustly to plan tasks that are better matched to the abilities of all pupils
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to reflect and assess their own and others' learning, and time to consolidate and deepen their understanding
 - providing more ambitious learning targets for all pupils which help them to understand the next steps towards achieving higher levels.

- Improve the impact of leadership on the quality of teaching and learning in all classes and ensure that:
 - there are clear milestones and stages in the school's improvement plan which specify who manages, monitors and evaluates pupils' progress and teachers' performance
 - teaching in all classes has a consistently good impact on pupils' learning and progress by January 2013
 - teachers take more responsibility for checking pupils' learning and assessments in order to intervene sooner