

Serco Inspections
Cedar House
21 William Street T 0300 123 1231
Edgbaston Text Phone: 0161 6188524
Birmingham enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk **Direct T** 0121 683 3261
B15 1LH www.ofsted.gov.uk **Direct email:** ann.morris@serco.com

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Gill Ellis
Acting Head of School
Catshill First School
Gibb Lane
Catshill
Bromsgrove
B61 0JP

Dear Mrs Ellis

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Catshill First School

Following my visit to your school on 27–28 November 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2011. 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 – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

No more than one newly qualified teacher may be appointed at this time in any year group. This will be reviewed again at the next monitoring inspection.

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 Worcestershire.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise attainment and rapidly accelerate progress for all pupils in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - making more effective use of assessment information to identify patterns of progress and underachieving groups or individuals
 - ensuring that all pupils understand their learning targets and how to achieve them.

- Improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching by:
 - eliminating weaknesses in teaching and ensuring that the large majority of teaching is at least good or better by autumn 2012
 - sharing good practice across all key stages by coaching staff to improve their practice and improving teachers' use of assessment information to plan lessons.

- Develop leadership expertise across the school to drive improvement by:
 - holding staff to account for pupils' learning and progress through rigorous monitoring and evaluation
 - ensuring that school improvement planning and monitoring are sharply focused on improving outcomes for pupils.

Special measures: monitoring of Catshill First School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 27–28 November 2012

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, the school's and local authority's action plans, progress reviews and governing body minutes. He met with the senior leadership team, comprising the executive headteacher and acting head of school; the Chair of the Governing Body; middle leaders responsible for managing subjects, aspects or phases of the school; and a representative of the local authority. The inspector spoke to groups of pupils and individuals in lessons and at break times, and met some parents and carers. He visited 12 parts of lessons with the acting head or senior teaching and learning mentor, and all teachers were observed teaching. The inspector heard a group of pupils read and discussed with them their assessments and progress in reading and writing. The school recently undertook a survey of parents and carers' views and the outcome of this was scrutinised.

Context

The executive headteacher from Catshill Middle School continues to have oversight of the school's improvement and progress. He manages the school as part of the soft federation between the two schools. As reported last time, the local authority seconded the school's improvement adviser to be directly responsible for the day-to-day leadership and management of the school and she continues her role as acting head of school. The governing bodies of both the First and Middle Schools have agreed to formally federate from January 2013. This has been sanctioned by the local authority and the application is currently being considered for formal approval. The intention is that one governing body will govern both the First and Middle Schools.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Improved teaching and more consistent and accurate assessments are raising pupils' achievement. Pupils' work and assessments show a significant rise in their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics, including of those eligible for pupil premium funding (the additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are in local authority care). Stronger teaching is accelerating pupils' progress so that those who were previously underachieving are catching up. Although below average by the end of Years 2 and 4 last year, the gap between pupils' attainment and national age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics is narrowing in all year groups. The large majority of current Year 2 pupils are already on course to reach or exceed the levels expected for their age, reflecting consistently good teaching and support since they joined in the Early Years

Foundation Stage. Sharper assessments and good teaching in Years 1 to 4, supplemented by well-focused intervention programmes for individuals and groups, are boosting pupils' learning and progress. Interventions have been particularly successful in targeting those pupils who had fallen behind in previous years.

Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs now benefit from much more effective support and intervention programmes. Phonics (the sounds that letters make) is taught consistently well and is accelerating the rise in attainment in reading and writing. Pupils' handwriting, spelling and use of punctuation are improving well in all classes although, in some lessons, pupils need more time to edit and self-correct their work to avoid making repeated errors, and to consolidate their understanding and use of spelling rules and punctuation. In mathematics lessons, pupils are making better progress than they were, including those targeted for special 'numbers counts' intervention work (this is a specialised one-to-one support programme). However, in some mathematics lessons, pupils do not always have enough extension work or opportunities to try different methods of calculation when solving problems.

The teaching and achievement of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage continues to be strong. The Nursery provides children with secure foundations for learning. The children quickly settle into routines and are developing early language and communication skills very well. Reception children are extremely well taught in both classes and soon learn to work independently. The children engage in conversations and most are now ready to work towards age-related levels in reading, writing and mathematics.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- raise attainment and rapidly accelerate progress for all pupils in reading, writing and mathematics – good.

The quality of teaching

The teaching is improving well in all classes. There is no inadequate teaching and only a small amount requires improvement. The large majority of teaching is now good or outstanding. The latest review by local authority advisers (October 2012) affirms that the teaching ranges from that requiring improvement to outstanding. Leaders have eradicated all inadequate teaching and, increasingly, more teaching is becoming good or outstanding as a result of well-devised training and support. Highly effective intervention programmes target those pupils who need the most help and this is complemented by the additional and well-focused support provided by better prepared and skilled teaching assistants.

Teachers do not waste time any more with over-long introductions or class discussions, features that were more common on previous monitoring inspections.

Lessons usually progress at a good pace with productive use of time-limited tasks that maintain pupils' interest and concentration. Teachers make very effective use of information and communication technology, such as smart boards and visualisers, which focus pupils on key learning objectives using clear illustrations and examples. These strengths are now common features of teaching that have resulted in pupils behaving better in lessons and making faster progress.

Teachers' planning has improved, with clear learning targets for pupils to aim for. Teachers use what are termed 'steps to success' to help pupils see what they have to do next to reach their targets. Learning targets are now pasted into pupils' workbooks and, combined with improvements to teachers' marking, provide pupils with clear stages for them to check how well they are doing. Pupils now have more information about their learning because teachers use a consistent approach when marking and assessing pupils' work. One pupil cited many examples of this by referring to her workbook, saying, for example, 'Look here, I've got two stickers on this target so I must now remember to write sentences with capital letters, commas and full stops to get the third sticker.' Another classmate also added that, 'You'll reach that higher level if you write question marks and exclamation marks too!'

Teachers' planning now includes 'key questions' to ensure that pupils understand what they are learning. This has sharpened class discussions and provided better opportunities for pupils to share and generate their own ideas when talking to a partner or working collaboratively in groups. However, teachers sometimes miss opportunities to extend learning further when they have not prepared enough additional extension tasks for pupils to tackle after completing their assigned work. In mathematics lessons, for example, teachers and support staff do not always ask extended questions to probe further or provide opportunities for pupils to explore different methods of calculation.

The acting head of school has introduced more effective and accessible systems to monitor and assess how well pupils are doing. This has led to more accurate and consistent assessments of pupils' learning so that teachers are better prepared to predict or set targets for pupils to aim for. Effective training and coaching since the last monitoring inspection has culminated in much sharper use of assessment so that tasks are now usually better planned to meet pupils' learning needs and abilities. Teachers are better able to capture the right information when checking pupils' work by sharing workbooks with colleagues to moderate their assessments, so ensuring greater consistency and accuracy.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching – good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils have been energised by the improvements to teaching. They talk with more confidence about their work and reading choices, and parents and carers spoken to confirmed that their children were reading more at home and changing their books more often. Many pupils told the inspector how much they enjoy their lessons because, as one confirmed, 'We do harder work and are expected to learn more.' They particularly enjoy explaining how well they understand their learning targets.

In most of the lessons observed, pupils' behaviour was outstanding. Pupils are now more engaged in practical and challenging tasks because the school has also improved the way it plans topics that combine subjects into interesting themes and projects. Pupils in Years 1, for example, are very excited and interested in their project about 'aliens', producing some excellent sculptures, pictures and writing. Pupils in Years 3 are thoroughly motivated and enjoy using comic book 'super-heroes' to create imaginative stories.

Pupils feel safe and secure, and form friendships easily. They are polite and courteous to their classmates and adults. Attendance is improving well and is in line with the national average. Pupils are punctual and the rate of persistent absence has reduced significantly.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The executive headteacher and acting head of school have transformed the school since it was placed in special measures. Together with the senior teaching and learning mentor, they have secured a platform for further improvement and success and are increasingly building further capacity for sustained improvement. Governors and leaders have increased the pace and intensity of improvement, leaving no stone unturned in their determination to eliminate weak teaching and raise standards. The soft federation between the Middle and First Schools is working extremely well in securing the necessary improvements to teaching. The head of school has demonstrated courage and resolve to get to this point in the school's journey out of special measures. She has brought to the school professionalism and integrity which have raised expectations. There are now challenging targets in the school's improvement and action plans for teachers and support staff to aim for. Staff morale is high and everyone is now pulling together because the staff feel valued, trusted and empowered to take on more responsibilities, knowing that they are getting better at teaching and supporting pupils.

There are now more regular pupil progress reviews and teachers and support staff have increased their knowledge and understanding of assessment to prepare for these reviews. This has led to much sharper and accurate analyses of pupils' progress and performance. Senior and middle leaders follow up these reviews by

monitoring lessons and pupils' workbooks regularly to make sure that all pupils make the progress they should to reach their challenging targets.

Governors and middle leaders are now much more involved in monitoring. Subject leaders have improved their skills and confidence to manage their respective areas by leading training sessions or working with teachers to improve their practice. The management of provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs has improved immensely since the last monitoring inspection. Sharp evaluations of these pupils' learning and progress are clearly mapped out to set out the most appropriate intervention programmes that focus on meeting individual pupils' needs. This has also contributed to a significant uplift in the attainment of groups and individuals who were previously falling behind.

The acting head of school is ambitious and highly organised in setting clear expectations for the school's community. The continuity between the First and Middle School is welcomed by parents and carers and this is also reflected in the comments made by those spoken to or who had responded to the school's recent survey. The head of school works closely with the senior teaching and learning mentor and local authority advisers to manage assessment and target setting, and they have set very challenging attainment targets for all year groups to aim for. Many actions have been completed successfully and their impact evaluated accurately. The senior teaching and learning mentor and head of school provide accurate and useful feedback to teachers and support staff. Action plans are robust, sharp and make it very clear what is expected each month. School self-evaluation continues to be robust and provides an accurate assessment of pupils' and teachers' performance. Records of pupils' assessed work are now better used to identify which pupils are falling behind, and leaders are effectively addressing any underlying weaknesses in the teaching that requires improvement.

The governing body has been strengthened by the inclusion of experienced governors from the Middle School, reflecting how well the federation is helping the school to improve quickly. It has appropriate plans in place to assess how well the school is doing through governor training, links with subject leaders and more focused committee meetings to check pupils' attainment, learning and progress. Governors receive regular reports and reviews of progress to help them hold the school to account.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the areas for improvement:

- develop leadership expertise across the school to drive improvement – outstanding.

External support

The local authority is providing very effective support. Termly reviews involving senior members of the local authority, school leaders and governors have helped to provide accurate measures of progress from lesson visits and pupil assessments. Planned actions since the last monitoring inspection in July 2012 have significantly increased the amount of good teaching across the school. Senior leaders and local authority consultants have implemented appropriate interventions to improve teaching. They provide effective feedback to teachers about the quality of plenaries in lessons and how to improve the pace of learning.