

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

PROTECT-INSPECTION

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

Direct T 0121 683 3287
Direct email:
Siobhan.Garrattley@serco.com



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Bernadette Higgins
Headteacher
Howard Primary School
St Olave's Road
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP32 6RW

Dear Miss Higgins

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Howard Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 17 December 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and other school leaders, members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. Checks were made on the school's systems for monitoring the performance of pupils and staff. The school improvement plan was evaluated, taking into account amendments made following the last inspection.

Context

Since the last inspection, one teacher has resigned following an extended period of sick leave. The resulting vacancy will be advertised in January. Temporary arrangements for teaching the affected class have been in place for some time and will continue next term.

Main findings

The school has moved quickly to revise its improvement plan to take into account the areas for improvement identified at the recent inspection. One of the key points was for greater delegation of responsibility within the senior leadership team. This is now evident, with the deputy headteacher and key stage leaders each leading on one or more aspects of the improvement plan.

Plans are already in place to improve the quality of outdoor learning in the nursery and reception classes. New outdoor activities are being devised and the teaching assistants are being given clearer guidance on how to help pupils learn through these and other activities.

The format of teachers' planning has been revised to place more emphasis on stretching the more able pupils. Changes are also being made to give pupils more opportunities to reflect on the feedback they receive, so they can improve their work. Monitoring is continuing to ensure that the pupils use these opportunities well.

The school has added to its existing plans to improve writing by introducing 'writing journals', scheduling additional training for teachers and by identifying more opportunities for pupils to write at length in a range of subjects.

The governing body receives regular reports from the headteacher and supplements this invitation by a range of direct contacts with pupils, staff and parents. However, the information on pupils' progress is not provided in an easily understood form. Governors provide a balance of challenge and support for the headteacher. Several governors have undertaken training to increase their skills in this respect. The governing body has sensibly taken advice from the local authority on its approach to performance management. Governors understand how teachers' are held to account, but most do not see confidential details.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, I recommend that further action is taken to:

- make it clear how the forthcoming training day on 'modelling writing' fits into to the overall strategy for improving writing, how it will be followed up, and how its impact will be monitored through lesson observation and checks of pupils' books
- ensure that the improvement plan includes clear targets for the extra pupil progress expected as a result of new initiatives
- liaise with the nearby middle school to obtain an analysis of the results of its Year 6 pupils who are former pupils of Howard Primary School
- improve the clarity of the summary data on pupils' progress that is provided to governors, so that it includes information about average progress rates and

the proportion of who are on track to make or exceed expected progress by the end of Year 4

- undertake a review of governance, focusing on how the governing body holds the school to account and its approach to confidentiality in respect of performance management information.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection. The school has agreed to provide Ofsted with termly updates on pupils' attainment and progress in each year group.

External support

The local authority has confidence that the school is improving and is maintaining its support through training and adviser visits. The school gains further support from its involvement in the local cluster group. This has been important in ensuring that its assessments of pupils work are accurate and trusted by the middle school. The school has also secured cost-effective training for staff through the Bury Learning Partnership.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector