

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

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

Direct T: 0121 679 9164
Direct email: tim.ogbourn@serco.com

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Ms Sarah Butterworth
Headteacher
Newtown Primary School
Buxton Road
New Mills
High Peak
SK22 3JS

Dear Ms Butterworth

Special measures monitoring inspection of Newtown Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22–23 January 2013, 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 taken place since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the second 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 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 Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely

Dorothy Bathgate
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Raise achievement in reading, writing and mathematics so that by July 2013 attainment at the end of Year 6 is at least in line with national averages, by:
 - setting ambitious targets for pupils based on prior attainment and robustly monitoring their progress towards these targets
 - improving the quality of teachers' marking so that pupils are clear about what they have done well and that they need to do to improve
 - providing opportunities for pupils to respond to marking and to correct their work
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to learn independently through their own research using books and information and communication technology (ICT), and to discuss their work and explain their thinking
 - teaching more lessons in which pupils have to think creatively, work in teams and solve problems.

- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' behaviour so that they are consistently good or better by April 2013, by:
 - eliminating inadequate teaching
 - using accurate assessment information to plan lessons that are matched to the learning needs of all pupils
 - planning learning activities that are consistently stimulating and challenging, and inspire pupils to work hard
 - improving teachers' questioning skills so that they are better able to develop pupils' understanding.

- Improve the curriculum so that pupils:
 - learn knowledge and skills sequentially and progressively
 - practice their communication and numeracy skills routinely in other subjects
 - benefit from learning activities that routinely enthuse and interest them.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - involving all stakeholders in establishing a clear vision and direction for the school

- ensuring that school improvement targets are firmly focused on improving the quality of teaching
- introducing systemic procedures to monitor the work of the school and to implement actions to address areas of underperformance
- developing the skills of subject leaders so that they are better able to lead and improve the subject for which they are accountable.

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 22–23 January 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, a group of pupils, the local authority education improvement adviser, and held a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Governing Body. The inspector visited all classes to observe teaching and learning and evaluated a sample of pupils' work.

Context

Since the previous inspection, two members of staff have left the school. At the time of the inspection, two new members of staff had taken up their posts within the previous two weeks.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Since the previous monitoring visit, pupils' achievement has begun to improve. This is because the quality of teaching is improving and attainment is rising. Observations of lessons during the inspection show an improving profile to the quality of teaching. Over half of the teaching observed during the inspection was good.

The results of the 2012 Key Stage 1 unvalidated teacher assessments indicate improvement in all areas of learning and outcomes are above the local authority and national averages. However, the results of the Year 1 phonics check were disappointing, with less than half of the cohort reaching the expected level.

The results of national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2012 show a significant improvement on those of the previous year and are above the government's floor standards. The progress made by the outgoing Year 6 pupils between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in English and mathematics is broadly in line with the national median.

The latest school data indicates that a greater proportion of pupils across Key Stages 1 and 2 are making the progress they should, but few are making better than expected progress with many continuing to make inconsistent progress throughout the school. Similar variations are found in the progress made by those eligible for free school meals and disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.

Pupils are increasingly being provided with opportunities to use their own initiative or make decisions for themselves. This is improving their independence, as well as their preparation for life outside school.

The quality of teaching

The headteacher and staff have worked hard, with good support from the local authority, to improve the quality of lessons. There has been an increase in the monitoring of teaching and learning by senior leaders, as well as greater rigour, which is beginning to benefit all staff. Staff training is having a positive impact on raising teachers' skills. The overall improvement in the quality of teaching is beginning to increase rates of progress, although this remains variable across the school.

Teachers' planning follows a common format, with a clear outline of what is to be taught. Assessment information is being used more effectively. Teachers are using this information to group pupils by ability and are beginning to use their knowledge of the pupils to make sure that each group has work that meets their needs. However, in some lessons, teachers do not pay sufficient attention to the pupils when they work so they miss opportunities to adapt the learning to help them to make better progress. In the best lessons observed, there were increased opportunities for pupils to discuss their work and to learn from each other. Most teachers strike the correct balance between pupils listening and working, and pupils report that lessons are more interesting and move at a better pace. Classrooms are calm learning environments with a purposeful atmosphere. All staff are working hard to improve the learning environment. Effective 'learning walls' provide pupils with a good range of learning support, including word banks, prompts and ideas.

The quality of guidance and marking is beginning to improve. All teachers mark books regularly and, increasingly, teachers are providing pupils with helpful comments so that they can check and correct their work, and understand what they need to do to improve and meet their targets. In all classes, there are planned opportunities for pupils to respond to marking and learn from their mistakes, with growing opportunities for them to evaluate their own and other pupils' work.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, the reorganisation of provision is not sufficiently addressing the weaknesses in teaching and learning that need to be rectified. Staff do not plan activities with enough attention to the learning that might be expected. As a result, too many children drift from activity to activity without engaging purposefully with them. The teaching of phonics is weak and children do not have sufficient opportunities to practise orally, or in writing, the sounds in words. Insufficient attention is paid to whether children are making the progress they could.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is usually good and relationships warm and friendly. Where pupils have opportunities to develop positive attitudes to learning and independence, they show that they can. However, in some lessons, their ability to develop these attitudes remains restricted because of the over-direction of the teacher.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

The headteacher is successfully communicating higher expectations to all staff. Since the previous monitoring visit, improved systems of monitoring and regular review meetings have enabled the headteacher to gain a clearer understanding of the key strengths and weaknesses and adopt appropriate strategies to bring about improvement. Inadequate teaching has been eradicated and achievement is rising, as is the quality of teaching. The impact of leadership and management on achievement and the quality of teaching has not been as great as might have been expected because, until very recently, some staff have not engaged positively with the improvement agenda. However, all staff are now taking responsibility for moving the school forward and are working hard to secure improvement.

Further staff training and moderation meetings are helping to ensure that teachers' assessments are accurate, allowing leaders to track pupils' progress effectively. Challenging targets and regular pupils' progress meetings emphasise teachers' accountability for raising pupils' achievement.

Greater distribution of leadership roles is still at an early stage of development because of the very recent changes in staffing which have taken place, with some leaders new to their roles. However, leaders at all levels demonstrate that they have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, as well as their roles in raising attainment. There are well-devised plans to develop these roles rapidly throughout this term.

The governing body demonstrates a growing understanding of the role it must take. Minutes from recent meetings indicate that the governing body is more regularly challenging information presented to it by the school, particularly relating to the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.

Safeguarding documents were checked during the monitoring visit and continue to meet latest requirements.

The previous inspection report asked the school to improve the curriculum to better meet the needs of pupils in all classes. The school remains at an early stage of responding to this area for improvement and it is too early to measure the impact on pupils' progress of actions taken.

External support

The local authority is continuing to provide strong support and guidance which is well tailored to meet the school's most urgent needs, particularly in regard to improving the quality of teaching and learning. Links with other schools have been fostered so that the school is able to draw on external support from a wider range of sources.

Priorities for further improvement

Priorities remain those identified at the time of the last inspection.