

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus T 0300 123 1231
Queensway Text Phone: 0161 6188524
Birmingham enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
B4 6AT www.ofsted.gov.uk Direct T: 0121 679 9158
Direct email: rachel.dayan@serco.com



14 February 2013

Mrs N Miller
Headteacher
Blanford Mere Primary School
Mimosa Walk
Kingswinford
DY6 7EA

Dear Mrs Miller

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Blanford Mere Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12–13 February 2013, 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 February 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 and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

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 Dudley.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Ensure that the more-able pupils in Key Stage 1 and all pupils in Key Stage 2 make good progress, particularly in mathematics in the latter stage, by improving the quality of teaching so that:
 - teachers use assessment information more rigorously and, as a consequence, work set meets pupils' needs and they are guided carefully through small learning steps
 - during lessons, teachers check regularly on pupils' learning, address any misconceptions, and ensure that pupils understand how to improve their work
 - the pace of learning in lessons is improved and teachers do not talk for too long
 - teachers' marking consistently provides pupils with clear and focused points for improvement
 - pupils are provided with more opportunities to practise and apply their academic skills, especially in numeracy, across the curriculum.

- Strengthen the capacity for sustained improvement by ensuring that:
 - leaders rigorously check how effectively pupils at all levels of attainment are challenged in lessons
 - all plans for improvement are focused sharply on improving pupils' achievement, have measurable outcomes and the effectiveness of the plans is monitored regularly
 - the governing body plays a more active role in monitoring and evaluating pupils' achievement.

Special measures: monitoring of Blanford Mere Primary School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 12–13 February 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and senior leadership team, groups of pupils, parents and carers, the Chair and other members of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority. Ten lessons were observed with senior staff.

Context

There have been no changes since the last monitoring visit.

Achievement of pupils at the school

In Year 6 in 2012 the percentage of pupils achieving National Curriculum Levels 4 and 5 in English were above average. The percentage of pupils achieving Levels 4 and 5 in mathematics were below average. However, the school's monitoring information indicates that an increasing proportion of pupils are making at least the progress they should across the school in both English and mathematics. In the majority of lessons observed by the inspector, pupils made good progress in both English and mathematics.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are beginning to make better progress in using numbers. This is because staff have focused on ways of increasing the time spent in ensuring that children can practise and use numbers. Mathematical language is taught and constantly reinforced in ways that children find interesting. For example, children organised a 'safari park' for other children to visit. Visitors paid money to come in and were given a special ticket after they had paid.

Staff are more effectively identifying and addressing gaps in pupils' learning. The Year 1 phonics screening is analysed to identify common weaknesses and to group pupils to provide them with better tailored support in class. Pupils are more confident in correcting their mistakes and are better able to explain what they understand and can do in mathematics.

In the mathematics lessons observed, pupils worked in small groups or pairs with appropriate equipment to help develop their independence and understanding of mathematical concepts. Pupils are more confident in explaining their understanding of more complex concepts using appropriate mathematical terms. Higher level work is a more consistent feature in Year 5/6 mathematics lessons, with opportunities for pupils to explain to the others in their class what they have learnt from their additional sessions. The more challenging work for higher attaining pupils in Year

5/6, in their extra sessions, is also beginning to encourage some of the middle attaining pupils to try and complete aspects of Level 6 work. Weaker pupils and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs are given extra support in lessons which is beginning to address their misconceptions. For example, a Year 1 class had been counting in twos, fives and tens, using coins. Careful questioning by the teacher and teaching assistants identified that some pupils were confused by using coins for counting. In the following lesson, pupils used counting blocks to model their number work, with the more confident learners moving on to work with coins.

The quality of teaching

The majority of lessons observed were good. The recent improvements in teaching have not yet had time to be reflected in pupils' attainment. Teachers' planning is improving and learning objectives have been re-thought so that they describe learning outcomes rather than tasks. Pupils' work in English and mathematics books indicated that every pupil had clearly identified steps in their learning which linked well to the school's 'stepping stones' booklets.

Teachers are encouraging the sharing of more complex work in mathematics lessons through their careful questioning of pupils about their work. However, opportunities are missed to display and use higher level work to encourage even more pupils to aim higher.

Teachers' use of questioning is improving and pupils are more frequently asked to explain their thinking. Teaching does not always enable pupils to demonstrate their reasoning. For example, in analysing a shape on the whiteboard, the teacher did not invite pupils to draw their ideas on the whiteboard and share them with the class. Pupils' answers are not always probed sufficiently to guide them from description towards giving reasons. Also, plenaries do not require pupils to ask their talk partners to give their reasons for their views on topics.

In all the lessons observed, teachers did not talk for too long and they encouraged pupils to work more quickly. For example, in a writing intervention group, one pupil used a large egg timer to time her answers. She explained how this was helping her to complete more work.

Teachers' marking is more consistent and explains 'what went well', and what would have been 'even better if', as well as the 'next steps' in learning. Pupils explained that they found these comments helpful. In some classes, pupils write a thoughtful response to their teacher's comments. Time is provided at the start of the day for pupils to make corrections on work from the previous day. This approach is beginning to encourage pupils to reflect on their work and to consolidate their learning.

More opportunities are identified to practise and promote numeracy across the curriculum. This is most successful when the topic has an identified mathematical component, such as designing a bag for a rainforest trek. However, occasionally, when the topic is used as the focus for the mathematics lessons, a lack of clear boundaries for the mathematics problem confuses pupils, particularly the middle attaining pupils, and they make less progress in that lesson. Family involvement in mathematics at home has been increased through the suggestions for mathematical fun activities for the Christmas holidays, which were enjoyed by families. Parents and grandparents are invited into school to take part in a mathematics lesson in Key Stage 1. Parents were overwhelmingly positive and stated this helped them to understand mathematical language better, clarified the different ways pupils are taught mathematical processes and helped them to understand some of their child's learning. Parents are very keen to have more opportunities to do this.

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

- ensure that the more-able pupils in Key Stage 1 and all pupils in Key Stage 2 make good progress, particularly in mathematics in the latter stage, by improving the quality of teaching – good.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are encouraged to be active learners in lessons and they behave responsibly. Pupils said they felt safe in school and that bullying and racism were very rare and swiftly dealt with. Parents and carers reported they had no concerns about their children's behaviour and safety.

Pupils' attendance is in line with national averages. The school works hard to help families with transport problems to improve attendance. Pupils are punctual to school and to class.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher and senior staff introduce initiatives well and are continuing to build the skills of teachers and subject leaders. Weaknesses identified in HMI monitoring visits are tackled rigorously by the senior leadership team. Senior leaders regularly monitor teaching and learning and pupils' progress. They have begun to monitor the impact of recently introduced initiatives such as the Christmas holiday homework and parents' visits to lessons to see how a subject is taught. This monitoring does not have the same rigor and evaluation of impact as does their review of other objectives.

All staff are now encouraged to scrutinise the work of their pupils and that of pupils in other classes. This practice has improved the consistency of marking because teachers now understand the impact that effective marking has on improving the

progress of all groups of pupils. Coaching and mentoring are encouraging teachers to improve pace and questioning and, as a result, pupils are beginning to learn more effectively.

The governing body has made links with a nearby successful school and is using these to ensure that their systems are robust. Governors have had training on how to use data to give them a more secure view of the school's performance. Updates from the school improvement committee meetings are used by governors, with increased confidence, to hold the school to account.

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

- strengthen the capacity for sustained improvement – good.

External support

The support from the local authority has been appropriately scaled back as the school has begun to effectively identify and develop its own good practice. The local authority representative has regular conversations with the headteacher and carries out termly reviews of progress. This provides a helpful moderation of the school's own monitoring and evaluation.