

Serco Inspections
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T: 0121 679 9154
Direct email: aidan.dunne@serco.com

3 May 2013

Mrs Nichola Gibson
Headteacher
Ellison Primary School
Ellison Street
Wolstanton
Newcastle
ST5 0BL

Dear Mrs Gibson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ellison Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 1–2 May 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 been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third 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.

The school may appoint no more than one newly qualified teacher before the next monitoring inspection. There are no restrictions on the year group in which they may work in.

PROTECT-INSPECTION



This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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 Staffordshire local authority.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Spencer
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Accelerate pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - improving the teaching of letters and sounds (phonics) in Key Stage 1
 - improving the accuracy of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar
 - ensuring that pupils produce a good amount of writing and have sufficient time to practise their skills
 - consistently implementing the school's calculation policy and ensuring that pupils complete a broad range of mathematical work.

- Boost the progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs by:
 - developing teachers' knowledge of disabilities and special educational needs
 - raising teachers' expectations of what disabled pupils and those with special educational needs can achieve
 - ensuring that support sessions are taught well and tailored carefully to meet pupils' needs
 - rigorously monitoring the progress of these pupils and robustly evaluating the impact of additional support.

- Eradicate inadequate teaching by:
 - making certain that teachers understand exactly what pupils are expected to learn in each lesson
 - making certain that work is carefully matched to pupils' needs
 - checking learning more frequently in lessons, including when pupils are working independently
 - ensuring that modelling, marking and target setting are used more effectively in order that pupils know exactly how to improve their work.

- Improve the impact of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by:
 - stabilising staffing so that there is greater continuity of provision for pupils
 - developing the skills of the new leadership team
 - improving the curriculum to develop pupils' basic skills.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 1–2 May 2013

Evidence

During this inspection, the inspector observed the school's work and scrutinised documents including the school's improvement plans, minutes from governing body meetings, data on pupils' progress, and the school's single central record of staff suitability checks. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, two groups of pupils, and three representatives of the governing body. Telephone conversations were held with the Local Leader of Education (LLE) headteacher, and a representative of the local authority. Informal conversations took place with parents and carers on the playground. The inspector observed eight lessons, taught by eight teachers. Two of these were observed jointly with the headteacher. The Early Years Foundation Stage classes were not visited in this inspection and will be included in the next visit.

Context

Since the last inspection, one teacher has left the school. There have been no other significant changes.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' progress in Key Stages 1 and 2 continues to accelerate because the quality of teaching is improving. As a result, the overall standards they are achieving in reading, writing and mathematics are broadly in line with those expected for their age. However, not enough pupils are currently working at the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics in Key Stage 2, due to their prior underachievement. This is because, in the past, teaching has not been sufficiently challenging. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs continue to make improved progress because staff have an increasingly accurate understanding of their needs. The impact of the interventions received by these pupils, including the school's successful programme to provide intensive reading support, is carefully tracked to ensure that pupils make enough progress. Pupils supported through the pupil premium are making strong progress and are closing the gap between themselves and other pupils. However, there remains a significant gap between this group and other pupils in the standards they achieve, particularly in writing and mathematics in Key Stage 2.

Pupils in Key Stage 1 continue to make good progress in developing their understanding of phonics (the sounds that letters make). This is because the school's teaching of phonics, with pupils working in ability groups, continues to be successful. During the inspection, pupils were observed using appropriate strategies to decode letters in order to read challenging words.

The standard of pupils' writing continues to improve. Short, sharply focused daily grammar and punctuation sessions and a new handwriting policy have been introduced this term. There are signs that these are beginning to make an impact on raising standards and improving the presentation of pupils' work. However, there are some inconsistencies between classes because some teachers do not fully apply the handwriting policy, or do not make the best use of time during their daily grammar and punctuation session.

Pupils continue to make good progress in their use of calculation in mathematics. This is because the school's calculation policy has been adhered to by all staff and strategies to support improvement, including daily 'maths blasts' (short, sharply focused mental calculation sessions) have continued to be successful. As a result, pupils are now much more confident. However, some significant gaps in their mathematical knowledge and understanding remain. For example, lower ability pupils in upper Key Stage 2 continue to struggle with their understanding of how to tell the time on digital and analogue clocks. Other pupils continue to find it difficult to solve problems related to time.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving rapidly and this is underpinning the improved progress of different groups of pupils. No inadequate teaching was observed during this visit. The proportion of good or better teaching observed has increased by 25% since the last monitoring visit and is now in line with the local authority target for the end of April 2013.

Teachers now use success criteria consistently well in lessons to ensure that pupils' learning is sharply focused on developing new skills and knowledge. Teachers and pupils are also using success criteria with increased effectiveness to evaluate learning and the progress made in each lesson. Teachers are assessing the amount of progress pupils make over time with increased accuracy, following support received from the local authority. The quality of teachers' marking and feedback to pupils continues to improve, and this is making an impact on pupils' better progress. Older pupils explained how they enjoy writing responses to their teacher's comments, to support their understanding of the next steps in learning they need to take.

Teaching assistants are receiving fortnightly training sessions from the school's senior leaders to develop their skills. These training sessions have covered a broad range of themes, including familiarisation with the school's calculation policy, expectations of pupils' handwriting, and support in teaching reading skills. As a result, there is improved consistency of high expectations from staff across the school.

Despite strong improvements in teaching quality, teachers do not always challenge more-able pupils as well as they could do in lessons. For example, teachers' questions do not always encourage or give sufficient time to enable more-able pupils to fully apply their knowledge and develop skills.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils continue to demonstrate positive attitudes to each other and to learning. Pupils were observed behaving well, and safely, in classrooms and in other areas of the school, including the playground and dining hall. Parents, carers and pupils report that behaviour is improving. One parent said: 'There used to be quite a few cases of bullying but the teachers just stop it straight away now. It is not a problem anymore.'

Pupils' attendance is slightly below average and is lower than it was during the same period last year. School leaders are aware of this, and a number of appropriate strategies have been implemented to improve attendance. However, school leaders recognise that attendance is now a priority for the school, and that it is essential for the school to work effectively with parents and carers to improve attendance and prevent any further decline.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders are growing in confidence and ability. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are successfully ensuring that leadership duties are better distributed among staff. For example, the headteacher has successfully trained the assistant headteachers to analyse data about pupils' performance to identify improvement priorities for the school. The deputy headteacher has identified leaders for each subject of the curriculum and supported each leader to devise a policy of expectations for their subject.

Leaders continue to have high expectations of staff. These expectations are communicated through termly improvement plans and individual targets to help improve teaching quality. Staff have responded positively to these and there is a continued, strong, determination to improve. Leaders are evaluating the performance of the school with increased accuracy. They understand that they now need to use this knowledge to produce a comprehensive school improvement plan to cover a longer period of time.

Relationships with parents and carers are improving. Parents and carers report that staff are 'easier to approach' than they have been in the past and respond quickly and effectively to any concerns they have. School leaders have recently set up a parent forum. Fewer parents and carers attended the first meeting than the school hoped for. However, parents who did attend report positively about the usefulness

of the meeting in clarifying their understanding of the school's systems, procedures and expectations.

The curriculum (the subjects and topics that pupils learn about) continues to improve and there are more opportunities for pupils to practise basic skills. For example, all pupils participated in a 'Giants Week', during which they focused on developing their mathematics skills. Parents and carers were invited into the school during the week to see pupils learning and also to find out about how the school teaches pupils to calculate numbers.

Representatives of the governing body are making good progress in developing their skills and are gaining an improved understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, governors are not making enough impact on improving the school because they are not systematically challenging senior leaders about pupils' performance. Governors recognise that they need to use their skills to greater effect by asking much more challenging questions of the school's leaders, particularly about the performance of different groups of pupils.

External support

The school continues to receive good support from the local authority and Local Leader in Education (LLE) partnership school. However, the intensity of this support has been reduced because school leaders are developing skills quickly and are becoming less reliant on external support. Work to support improved accuracy in teachers' assessments of pupils' work has been particularly effective. As a result, teachers now level pupils' work accurately and are not overgenerous in their assessments.

In time for the next monitoring visit in the Autumn term 2013, school leaders must use their knowledge and understanding of the school's work to produce a school improvement plan for the 2013/2014 academic year.

The plan must:

- be realistic and include clear timescales
- link each action very closely to the expected impact it will make on raising pupils' achievement
- include measurable success criteria for each action
- state very clearly who will be checking each action, when it will be checked, and how it will be checked.