

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

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



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Mrs Sally Fenby
Headteacher
Old Hill Primary School
Lawrence Lane
Cradley Heath
B64 6DR

Dear Mrs Fenby

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Old Hill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 21 June 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 March. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with yourself and the assistant headteacher, the special educational needs co-ordinator, the Chair and Vice Chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A number of documents were reviewed including the governors' action plan, a summary of current achievement data and your monitoring records. Together with the assistant headteacher, we made a short visit to four classrooms to talk to pupils and look at the work in their books.

Context

Since the last inspection the Year 1 teacher has resigned and is leaving in July. The Year 4 teacher is on maternity leave and has resigned from her leadership position. A newly qualified teacher is covering this maternity leave and will become a

permanent member of staff in September. An additional assistant headteacher has been appointed for September and will be the subject leader for English. Five governors have resigned and two new governors have been appointed. As a result of restructuring, the Governing Body will be made up of 11 rather than 13 members.

Main findings

The school's action plan is appropriately focussed on tackling the issues identified in the previous inspection. It contains clear timescales and it identifies the senior leaders and teaching staff that will be monitoring the impact of the actions taken. It is not clear the role that governors will play in monitoring the actions.

The monitoring of teaching that school leaders have undertaken indicates that the proportion of the teaching across the school that is good or better has increased since the previous inspection. Appropriate strategies are in place to provide support to teachers whose teaching is not yet good. School data show rates of progress, particularly in reading and mathematics are improving.

My visits to classrooms confirms the findings of monitoring undertaken by senior leaders, which found that as a result of a new revised marking policy, pupils are now more regularly responding to the comments teachers make about their work. This is helping pupils understand what they need to do to improve. However, there are still inconsistencies in practice between classes that need addressing.

Through the introduction of a new lesson structure, senior leaders have effectively focused on raising teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve in mathematics lessons. Pupils are responding with enthusiasm to this new level of challenge and in my visits to lessons, they were keen to try the 'mission impossible' tasks that the teachers had prepared. Increasingly regular checks on the progress that pupils make in writing means that activities are more often set at the right level. My observations identified that teaching assistants are not always used as effectively as they could be to maximise the progress pupils make within the classroom.

Senior and middle leaders have benefitted from working with leaders from a local good school. They are taking more responsibility for the leadership of the areas for which they are responsible. They are now supporting other staff to improve their practice. This is particularly evident in mathematics and in the assessment of writing.

Governors have produced their own action plan, which focuses on the areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection. Many of the actions however, have yet to take place and governors do not have a good understanding of how well the school is doing. An external review of governance has not yet been organised.

Senior leaders are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The support and challenge provided by the governors is not effective. The school should take further action to:

- ensure the school's action plan clearly identifies the role of governors in the monitoring process
- address the remaining inconsistencies in marking to enable all pupils to make better progress in their learning
- organise, as a matter of urgency, an external review of governance to identify the training governors require.

I will contact the school before the end of term to ensure that the governors have made arrangements for an external review to be conducted.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority has provided a good level of support for the headteacher and the staff. The partnership with a local leader of education and members of her staff has been particularly helpful in developing the skills of senior and middle leaders. The school has begun to establish some useful links with other local partners and this is helping teachers whose teaching is good, to improve their practice further. There is scope for governors to benefit from these partnerships

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

Yours sincerely

Rachel Howie
Her Majesty's Inspector