

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

Direct T 0121 6799163
Direct email: lewis.mackie1@serco.com



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Mr Robert Hawkesford
Headteacher
Yew Tree Primary School
Wherretts Well Lane
Solihull
B91 2SD

Dear Mr Hawkesford

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Yew Tree Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 25 June 2013 with Janet Connor HMI, 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 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, four governors and a representative from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school's action plan and other documents related to the school's areas for improvement were evaluated. We made short visits to each classroom and had the opportunity to talk to pupils during this time and while having lunch.

Context

There have been no staffing changes since the time of the last inspection. However, two new teachers will join the school in September 2013.

Main findings

The school's evidence suggests that pupils in all year groups are making quicker progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders and teachers have worked

with other schools to make sure that assessments they make of pupils' work are accurate. These assessments are showing that pupils in Year 6 have made better progress than the year group who left school in 2012. While achievement in mathematics is improving, there are still not enough pupils making good or better progress in this subject. From September, the deputy headteacher is taking on leadership responsibility for mathematics.

The school's action plan is focused on the relevant areas for improvement with timescales that are measurable for this term. There now needs to be a longer term plan which makes clear what steps leaders need to take to achieve the vision of 'getting to good'.

Weaknesses in teaching are beginning to be addressed. However, checks on the quality of teaching need to be more frequent. More pupils are now responding to and acting on the advice teachers give in written feedback. This is a direct result of teacher training and the higher expectations you and other leaders have of this aspect of teaching. In the small sample of lessons we visited, some teachers chose their questions carefully to make sure pupils explained their answers in detail. Pupils in the nursery and reception classes were interested and excited about learning and keen to tell us about the life cycle of frogs. Some pupils were writing fluently for their age and able to read aloud what they had written. The strong practice in these years has not yet been shared widely enough. One reason that teaching is not yet good is because lessons are not matched well to what pupils already know and can do. Pupils' behaviour was consistently good in the lessons observed and at lunchtime.

As senior leaders, you and the deputy headteacher have a clear understanding of how well pupils, and groups of pupils, are achieving in all year groups. Regular 'pupil progress meetings' are identifying where individuals or groups of pupils are falling behind. As a result of these meetings, the deputy headteacher has worked with individual teachers to secure improvements.

Governors are committed and actively seeking ways to further strengthen the effectiveness of their work. They now have a better understanding of how well all pupils are making progress and they have reinforced to parents their expectations of good attendance. Together with the work of senior leaders and the local education welfare officer, this has resulted in improved attendance since the inspection. All members of staff understand that pupil absence rates are still too high, despite recent improvements. Strategies to reward high levels of attendance have been developed, including by one governor donating bicycles as prizes for pupils who have an attendance rate of 100%.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- increase the frequency with which they check the quality of day-to-day teaching and make sure this is focused sharply on how well pupils are learning
- increase opportunities to share the features of strong teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage with teachers in other years
- devise a longer term action plan that translates the vision of 'getting to good' into clearly identified steps to achieve this goal.

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 some appropriate support which you and governors have valued. This has been particularly helpful in improving the teaching of mathematics and helping governors to have a greater understanding of how well pupils are achieving in comparison to national averages. Local authority officers have also set up visits to other schools, for example where pupil target setting is strong. As a result, you are now adapting the ways in which you check the targets teachers set for pupils. The most recent local authority adviser visit was not focused on one of the school's key areas for improvement but on the behaviour and safety of pupils, which had been judged as 'good' by Ofsted. This was not the most effective use of time.

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

Yours sincerely

James McNeillie
Her Majesty's Inspector