

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 01216 799162
Direct email: siobhan.garrattley@serco.com



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Adrian Pembleton
Headteacher
Caslon Primary School
Beeches View Avenue
Halesowen
B63 2ES

Dear Mr Pembleton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Caslon Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 July 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 May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the deputy head teacher, four governors, including the joint Chairs of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A range of documentation was reviewed, including the latest information about pupils' progress, feedback to teachers following lesson observations. During this visit, you and the deputy headteacher joined me on brief visits to some classes to review teachers' work.

Context

There have been no contextual changes since the school was judged to require improvement at its previous inspection.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection you have responded quickly to the areas for improvement your records show that you have:

- written a well-focused action plan concentrating on what needs most improvement
- made sure that governors are more proficient in asking the right questions and have a better understanding of the information provided on pupils' progress
- improved your systems for checking on the work of teachers and how pupils' progress is assessed and recorded
- strengthened the procedures for managing the performance of teachers and the link it has to any subsequent pay rises.

You are leading the improvements in the school well. Greater levels of accountability are being put in place to ensure that subject leaders are more effective. You are quite rightly planning to reorganise the senior and middle leadership of the school to improve its effectiveness.

A scrutiny of your records shows that there are suitable systems to keep a check on pupils' learning and progress in lessons and in their books. However, there is not a system in place to check on the development of specific language skills for those pupils who speak English as an additional language, or who are advanced bi-lingual learners and this sometimes restricts their progress.

Through your regular checks on the quality of teachers' work and information gathered on pupils' progress, You recognise that there is much work to do to raise pupils' achievement in mathematics. Your plan shows that you have decided quite rightly to make sure that a high priority is given to improving the mathematics curriculum. It was apparent during our joint visits to classrooms that teachers do not always provide activities that help pupils to deepen their understanding of the topic they are studying. For example when learning how to calculate the area of a rectangle, pupils were given questions that merely required them to multiply two numbers together. Many pupils had quickly worked out that they could repeat the same process for each problem without having to understand fully the concept of area. In other classes, pupils were given word problems involving fractions to solve at the same level of difficulty. Similarly, older pupils in another class were not guided to use a systematic approach to solving mathematical puzzles involving logic.

Reports from the subject leaders, although providing a useful summary of how protected management time was used. These reports are not sharply focused on demonstrating the impact that the subject leaders have had on raising the achievement of different groups of pupils. This makes it difficult for governors and yourself to readily check the effectiveness of their work. The governors are aware that:

- pupils do not make as much progress in mathematics as they do in reading and writing
- those teachers who have responsibilities for subjects are at an early stage of checking on the quality of teaching and learning
- governors are not fully involved in gathering first-hand evidence of the impact and effectiveness of the school's work.

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:

- provide appropriate help and guidance to teachers so that they are better able to meet the particular needs of those pupils who speak English as an additional language
- ensure that subject leaders are quickly equipped with the necessary skills to carry out their roles effectively
- Undertake an in depth review of the mathematics curriculum to make sure that all of the required topics and concepts are covered in the necessary depth so that pupils develop a greater fluency with key mathematical skills and concepts and so raise standards.

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 knows the school well and has regular discussions about the school's progress. This support has strengthened leadership within the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector