

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 679 9169
Direct email: elizabeth.rashvand@serco.com



16 July 2013

Susan Camp
Headteacher
Forres Primary School
Stanstead Road
Hoddesdon
EN11 0RW

Dear Mrs Camp

Requires improvement: monitoring visit to Forres Primary School

Thank you for welcoming me when I visited your school last week. This visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection on the 6 November 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

This visit was focused on mathematics. Improvements in mathematics teaching have led to a 19% increase in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level at the end of Key Stage 2 so that 89% of these pupils met or exceeded the expected level this year. This is to be celebrated and I congratulate you, your staff and your pupils on achieving this.

The purpose behind this visit was to identify and discuss strategies to increase the proportion of pupils who exceed the expected level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 2. To do this, I observed mathematics lessons throughout the school with the mathematics leader. We looked at work in pupils' books and discussed plans and actions taken so far. This was a positive visit and I noted an improvement in teaching and leadership overall. This letter focuses on further priorities to inform your continuing school improvement in mathematics.

As a result of my visit I recommend that the school focuses professional development in mathematics to:

Ensure that all lessons build on previous learning. This is particularly necessary in Years 1 and 2. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make a strong start in mathematics. The work that I saw was challenging children. One group gleefully showed off their ability to count in multiples of fives and another group was successfully wrestling with subtraction. This level of confidence sets them up to achieve well in Key Stage 1. It was noticeable that pupils seen in one Year 1 class did not demonstrate the same flare for number. In this lesson the challenge and expectation was too low. It is essential that teachers in Key Stage 1 are ready to

continue the good work started in the Early Years Foundation Stage and that next year's Year 2 make rapid progress so they catch up quickly.

Make sure that pupils understand the mathematics behind the calculation strategies they are being taught. To do this, teachers need to be clear about the reasons why a calculation method works in the way that it does. Pupils need to be able to understand why different calculation strategies work and how they relate to each other. In some classes, pupils were given instructions to complete a calculation but they did not understand how or why the method worked. Pupils had a limited conceptual understanding and, if they forget the procedure in the future, they may well struggle to work out what to do if they get stuck. Teachers could use physical representations such as arrays or place-value apparatus to show the value of numbers in comparison with each other and the way that calculations work. Such practical apparatus creates mental images that can be important memory aids, including for older and able pupils, which can help them better visualise numbers, methods of calculation, number properties and relationships.

Make sure word problems are varied enough so pupils have to think about what they need to do to solve a problem. In too many classes, pupils were given word problems that they did not need to read because they knew the calculation that was expected. Where this was the case, pupils only needed to find the two numbers in the question and, in one lesson, multiply them to be successful. This did not develop their problem-solving skills. Problems should demand a greater scrutiny by pupils so they need to think harder about the mathematics that they need. Ofsted will soon publish a presentation and materials that you can use for professional development in this area.

Ensure that pupils are given opportunities to justify their answers and explain their thinking. In some classes, teachers and teaching assistants only asked pupils 'why?' when they got the answer wrong. Pupils associated such questions with the wrong answer and usually did not then respond. It is important that pupils have the opportunity to explain their thinking for both correct and incorrect answers. Exploring incorrect answers will provide teachers with an opportunity to identify misconceptions. Exploring correct answers will help pupils explain and understand the mathematics behind the question further, and sometimes see alternative approaches.

I hope these observations and recommendations are useful. I would be happy to discuss your plans for implementing further improvements in September. Please pass on my best wishes to your colleagues and my congratulations for the improvements seen so far.

Yours sincerely

Michael Sheridan
Her Majesty's Inspector