

PROTECT-INSPECTION

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 9162
Direct email: siobhan.garrattley@serco.com



15 October 2013

Mr James Hickish
Headteacher
Ely St Mary's CofE Junior School
High Barns
Ely
CB7 4RB

Dear Mr Hickish

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ely St Mary's CofE Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 14 October 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 July 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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:

- make clearer in your raising achievement plan, the starting points and targets for different groups of pupils, so that the impact of teaching on the progress made by all pupils is monitored closely
- make sure that your expectations of staff match the criteria used to judge the quality of teaching and learning, and promotes the best practice existing in the school and in the schools you are working with
- involve all staff in evaluating the school's work, through self-evaluation, observations of teaching, discussions with pupils, analysis of pupils' work in a range of subjects, within and across year teams
- use the good curriculum and ethos of the school as a context for improvements, for example to develop and apply reading, writing, mathematical skills, independence and inquiry.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, the literacy and mathematics leaders, two governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority. I evaluated the school action plan, reviewed monitoring records, analysed pupil progress data and visited classes to see pupils and staff at work.

Context

Since the inspection, four staff have left the school and have been replaced with suitably qualified teachers. A review of governance has started.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have:

- written a raising achievement plan to prioritise improvements
- produced an operational plan to manage and monitor your actions
- raised your expectations of staff, published in your new staff handbook
- developed a new planning format for teachers and support staff
- redeployed teaching assistants, following an audit of their work
- restructured the roles and responsibilities of key staff
- monitored the quality of teaching more regularly using a new approach.

You and your deputy have observed all teachers teach since the inspection. You have evaluated the quality of pupils' work and you have questioned pupils about their work. This approach has helped you to focus more on teachers' effectiveness. You are visiting lessons more often where you have found that pupils' learning is not good enough. Your lesson observation notes indicate that staff receive fair and balanced feedback when lessons are discussed. However, your feedback letters to staff do not set clear enough targets, identifying which strengths you expect staff to share with others and which weaker areas you will check. As a consequence, although the quality of teaching is improving there are still inconsistencies between teachers. For example, when we looked at pupils' books together you agreed that some teachers give pupils much more helpful guidance than others when marking. Teachers do not see others teach enough to reach these conclusions for themselves.

Your work to help teachers meet the needs of different pupils in their class is proving effective. The speaker you invited to talk about differentiation helped your staff develop a shared understanding. In the lessons we visited, teachers and teaching assistants had clearly organised different activities for pupils at different stages in their learning. Staff clearly give additional attention to pupils who find learning difficult. However, more able pupils who finish their work quickly could find out more for themselves, for example by using computer resources to respond to additional challenges. The performance of your Year 6 pupils in 2013 indicates that there are still not enough pupils reaching the higher levels in English or mathematics. Your raising achievement plan does not say enough about how you

will use your knowledge of different pupils' starting points to deploy the wider range of teaching approaches that staff are developing.

Your Year Leaders' displays of pupils' work in the school hall, changed on a weekly basis, are helping to promote good quality work. You also shared some striking displays in classrooms, particularly in the specialist room for science teaching. There is little work currently that shows how pupils are developing and applying literacy, numeracy and other important skills across the curriculum. This represents a missed opportunity given the school's inspiring curriculum, enriched by experiences such as the 'Forest School' initiative or visits to places of worship nearby. However, you are beginning to use your visits to other schools not only to learn from good practice elsewhere, but also to strengthen your confidence to 'get to good and outstanding' by making more of your distinctiveness as a school.

The Governing Body is finding the current review of governance a rigorous but rewarding process. The roles of governors already relate to some of the school's improvement priorities. For example, one of your governors is linked to 'gifted and talented' pupils. However, other priorities do not have such a clear line of challenge or support, for example improving pupils' reading.

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

You value the quality and range of support provided by the local authority and the Diocese. This has helped to sharpen your improvement planning and speed up your actions. As part of the Cambridgeshire 'Getting to Good' programme you are benefitting from work with other headteachers in the locality. You are using links with other schools, including those in the independent sector, judiciously. You also have some innovative plans to work collaboratively with others in the Ely Schools Partnership. For example, your plans to jointly observe lessons in different phases of education are a useful starting point to improve pupils' transition and maximise their potential.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Ely.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector