

Serco Inspections
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T: 0121 679 9163
Direct email: lewis.mackie1@serco.com



28 November 2013

Chris Beddow
Headteacher
Abbey Meadows Primary School
Galfrid Road
Cambridge
CB5 8ND

Dear Mr Beddow

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Abbey Meadows Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 27–28 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in February 2013. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire.

Yours sincerely

David Rzeznik
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better, especially in Key Stage 1, by making sure all staff:
 - have high expectations of what pupils know and can do, and plan tasks that are challenging and meet their individual needs
 - reduce the amount of time they spend talking to the class as a whole, giving pupils more time to apply the skills they have been taught
 - move lessons along at a good pace so that pupils do not spend a long time completing simple tasks
 - deploy teaching assistants more effectively throughout lessons to support pupils' learning
 - give pupils more opportunities to make decisions about their work and sufficient resources so that they are not reliant on adults
 - have marked pupils' books, and given them time to respond to comments and correct their mistakes.

- Accelerate the progress of pupils who are new to speaking English, especially in Key Stage 1, by:
 - improving the expertise of all staff in helping pupils communicate clearly
 - providing appropriate support that enables them to take part in lessons and make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

- Raise achievement in writing by:
 - involving pupils in more activities that help them to develop their spoken language, talk confidently in a range of situations, and think through their creative ideas before writing them down
 - showing pupils, in imaginative ways, how to write using correct grammar, punctuation and spelling
 - encouraging pupils to write for a wide range of reasons and at length.

- Ensure that leaders, managers and members of the governing body:
 - draw up and implement an action plan to bring about rapid improvement in Key Stage 1
 - check the quality of teaching rigorously with a focus on what the pupils are learning, rather than what the teacher is doing
 - offer greater challenge to the school with regard to its performance in all year groups, and in comparison with schools nationally.

- An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Serious weaknesses: monitoring of Abbey Meadows Primary School

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 27–28 November 2013

Evidence

The inspection concentrated on evaluating the extent of improvement in addressing the serious weaknesses identified in February 2013.

The inspector met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteachers, Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and a parent governor, English and mathematics leaders, the school improvement adviser and the local authority senior improvement adviser.

The inspector observed six lessons in Reception and Key Stages 1 and 2. All of the lesson observations were conducted with senior leaders. Feedback was given to all of the teachers so that they knew what aspects of teaching were good and what must be improved. A review of pupils' work in Years 2 and 6 was undertaken with senior leaders. This was to evaluate the quality of marking in English and mathematics, to check if teachers are improving pupils' grammar, punctuation and spelling skills quickly, and whether pupils are writing at length or not. A range of documentation was evaluated, including the school's improvement plan and pupil performance data, records of governing body meetings, reports of visits conducted by local authority improvement advisers, and school monitoring and evaluation records. The inspector also took into account the 29 responses to the online Ofsted parental questionnaire (Parent View). Pupils' views were sought informally.

A weakness identified at the first monitoring visit in May 2013 was followed up by evaluating the single central register to ensure that the date of checks and the person carrying them out are always specified.

Context

In September 2013, the English and mathematics leaders' roles changed from temporary to permanent, and two new assistant headteachers were appointed. One works full time, and is currently responsible for assessment and oversees teaching in Years 4, 5 and 6. The other assistant headteacher works three days a week, and is the school's special educational needs coordinator. A Reception teacher and a Year 1 teacher left in July 2013. Two new replacement teachers were appointed in September 2013, and four teachers returned, having been absent during the previous academic year. They are all working part time and share teaching responsibilities in a Year 3 and a Year 5 class. Two coopted governors were appointed in November 2013. The school now has a full complement of governors.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Senior leaders and governors have a well-focused improvement plan which is suitably addressing the school's most important weaknesses. The actions taken so far are improving teaching, raising standards in Key Stage 1, and improving the quality of leadership and management at all levels.

The leadership of English as an additional language, and the provision made for those who are beginners in English, requires further improvement. There is no coherent teaching programme to show how pupils at the very early stages of acquiring English will quickly acquire the necessary communication and language skills to cope with school life and the activities taught in class. Not all teachers are coping well with the demands of teaching these pupils in class, particularly providing activities that meet their specific linguistic needs. Work to improve the teaching of reading is having a positive impact, particularly on improving pupils' knowledge of letters and sounds in Reception and in Years 1 and 2.

Pupils' attainment and progress are being tracked and the results are used to focus support to further raise standards and improve teaching. For example, work with Key Stage 1 teachers to rectify weaknesses in the teaching methods used, and the activities provided, led to a significant rise in standards in 2013. However, the analysis of data is too complicated. Consequently, it is difficult to see quickly pupils' attainment and rate of progress in reading, writing and mathematics in every year group.

Focused monitoring of teaching by senior leaders and school improvement advisers has helped to improve teaching and accelerate pupils' progress in English and mathematics. Inadequate teaching has been eliminated. Any teachers who are not ensuring pupils are making good gains in their learning are identified, and targeted support is provided to bring about the necessary improvement in pupils' learning. Nevertheless, there is not enough good teaching in Years 1 to 6 to ensure all pupils achieve well in English and mathematics.

English and mathematics leaders are working closely with local authority advisers to improve pupils' writing and mathematical skills and the resources used to support learning. Work in mathematics is helping to improve the balance between teachers talking to the class and pupils doing activities on their own or in groups. A new writing framework was implemented in September 2013, because Year 6 test results in 2013 showed that pupils' vocabulary, spelling, punctuation and grammar skills were insufficiently developed. Pupils' books reveal that the spelling and punctuation guidance is not being consistently applied in all year groups.

An external review of governance was carried out in June 2013 by a local authority specialist. Training and an audit of governors' strengths and weaknesses have led to an improvement in their effectiveness and expertise. Governor committees have been reorganised and the new ways of working are more efficient. Governors are

given roles that are linked to their capabilities and interests, and they are much better at holding senior leaders to account for school outcomes. They rigorously check performance data and the impact of initiatives, and challenge the impact in governing body meetings. Governors no longer rely on the headteacher's view about the school's performance. They find things out for themselves and closely examine the available evidence. For example, they are keeping a particularly close eye on how well pupils who are eligible for free school meals, boys, more-able pupils and those at the early stages of acquiring English are achieving.

Appropriate arrangements have been made to evaluate, with senior local authority advisers, the progress made on the school's main areas for improvement, and to inform parents about how well it is improving. Questionnaire responses indicate that parents are much happier with the quality of education provided than they were in February 2013. The vast majority say they think the school is led and managed well and would recommend it to another parent.

All of the required recruitment and vetting checks have been carried out on staff and other adults to confirm their suitability to work with children. In May 2013, the single central register did not contain all of the necessary information. Not all weaknesses have been addressed. The person carrying out the required vetting checks is now specified; however, the date when checks are carried out is not always made explicit.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teaching and learning are improving, and underachievement has been eliminated because teaching is more effective and reading, writing and mathematics activities are of better quality.
- Good use has been made of local authority expertise to improve senior leaders' monitoring skills, teachers' subject knowledge, and the methods used to teach English and mathematics. Greater thought has been given to how teaching assistants are used, and the nature and quality of support they provide.
- Reception children's listening, speaking, reading and writing skills are continuing to develop well. This is because the teaching of basic skills is effective and the planned activities to promote communication, language and literacy skills are matched well to children's specific needs and abilities.
- There is generally a good balance between the amount of time teachers spend talking to the whole class and the opportunities provided for individual or independent group activities. Expectations are higher and the pace of learning is much improved. Pupils are encouraged more to make decisions about their work, such as what methods to use to create symmetrical patterns.
- Teachers in all year groups are encouraging pupils to write in a range of different styles and forms. Pupils' books reveal that their creative ideas and their

use of descriptive language are developing well. In Year 2 some individuals are writing at length.

- In the lessons observed, all pupils, including those whose first language was not English, were encouraged to talk to the teacher and each other to further develop their spoken language. Most pupils were able to talk confidently and fluently in a variety of different contexts.
- Marking is much improved. Teachers are generally good at identifying the next steps in learning to bring about improvement. When criticism is made it is constructive. Time is given for pupils to respond to any points for improvement.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teachers do not always clearly identify what pupils can and cannot do before planning lessons. Assessment information is not always used effectively to ensure work is properly matched to pupils' capabilities. There are times when activities lack challenge and pupils consolidate their learning rather than extending it.
- Lesson planning is not comprehensive enough. The level of the work for different ability groups is not always explicit. Success criteria are identified in plans, but sometimes the success measures are vague and the wording is beyond the comprehension of some individuals. It is therefore difficult for pupils to judge if they have achieved objectives or not. Plans do not make clear which pupils will achieve the 'could' and 'should' criteria.
- Teachers are not improving pupils' spelling and punctuation sufficiently rapidly. Pupils are not writing at length often enough. Sometimes teaching assistants do not rectify errors or intervene quickly to remedy pupils' specific weaknesses or misconceptions.
- The school lacks expertise in teaching English as an additional language. Class teachers have not had sufficient training in relevant techniques and methods to teach beginners in English effectively. Not all teachers are coping well with the demands of teaching EAL learners in class, particularly providing activities that meet their specific linguistic needs. An assistant headteacher has responsibility for this work, but it is not his area of expertise.
- Lesson monitoring records do not provide an overall judgement for the quality of teaching and learning. They specify the main strengths and weaknesses in the lesson observed, but the evaluations do not say enough about the quality of learning or the impact teaching is making on pupils' progress.

External support

Good support from local authority improvement advisers has been effective in improving teaching and accelerating pupils' progress, particularly in Key Stage 1. Their work has improved the leadership skills of senior leaders and their ability to monitor the quality of teaching and learning effectively. Training provided by local authority literacy and numeracy advisers has improved teachers' subject knowledge and the methods used to teach English and mathematics.

Staff training has been based appropriately on key priorities for the school as well as the identified needs of individuals. Improvement advisers have worked closely with senior leaders to eradicate inadequate teaching and to identify what individual teachers must do to improve their teaching from adequate to good.

Focused support has ensured that governors are now holding senior leaders to account and making best use of their expertise to drive improvement. An EAL adviser has provided suitable support to improve assessment procedures and induction arrangements for new arrivals and their families.