

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: mathew.mitchell@serco.com

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Andrew Everett
Interim Headteacher
Ellesmere Primary School
Elson Road
Ellesmere
SY12 9EU

Dear Mr Everett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ellesmere Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 October 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. 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 2014. 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:

- ensure that the targets recorded on written plans reflect leaders' ambition that pupils' progress accelerates so that it is good for all classes and groups of pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you as the interim headteacher and with the deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher. I also met with three governors including the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body. In addition I

met with a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. Short visits were made to classrooms. The school improvement plan was evaluated and I considered a number of other documents, including information about the checks that leaders make on the quality of teaching and on pupils' progress.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in July, the previous headteacher, who took up post in September 2013, left the school at the end of the summer term. You were appointed as interim headteacher at the beginning of October 2014.

Main findings

Since your appointment as interim headteacher earlier this month, you have quickly developed a good understanding of the school's current position and the urgent need for improvement. You have been very well supported by the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher who know the school well and who have already begun to drive forward the necessary changes.

Your written improvement plan covers all the areas for improvement identified during the Section 5 inspection in July. The plan clearly sets out the actions that will be taken and specifies which leader is responsible for checking that the required changes are being successfully implemented. However, the plan is not always precise enough about how leaders will measure progress or decide if the actions have been successful.

The targets recorded on your written plans for improving pupils' achievement are not ambitious enough to ensure that pupils' progress quickly becomes good. However, it is clear from other documents and from my discussions with you and other senior leaders, that you have a clear understanding of the need for pupils to make rapid progress, in order to make up for poor teaching in the past.

You have focused on improving teaching in order to raise pupils' attainment and have rightly begun to use a wider range of evidence to ensure that you can make secure judgements about the quality of teaching. Your records clearly show that you are making more frequent visits to lessons and are regularly checking on the work in pupils' books. You also use information from teachers' lesson plans to inform your judgements. This evidence, along with information about pupils' progress is now helping you to identify common areas for improvement in teaching and use this to plan training and support for staff. Training has already taken place to improve teacher's subject knowledge and confidence in teaching phonics (the sounds that letters make) and four training sessions are planned in order to secure teachers subject knowledge in mathematics.

Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching have also confirmed that teachers are not all able to accurately assess pupils' knowledge and skills and this hampers their ability to plan work which builds on what pupils already know, understand and can do. You have quickly introduced more opportunities for teachers to work together with colleagues, from within and beyond the school, in order to ensure that their assessments are consistent. Leaders have also planned training to help teachers plan lessons and set work which is demanding enough for pupils of different ability.

When appropriate you have begun to provide more tailored support for individual teachers to help them improve their skills. This work should be extended and the support provided should be documented, along with a record of how and when leaders will check that the necessary improvements are being made.

The marking policy has been reviewed and you are using more frequent checks on pupils' books to check that teachers' comments help pupils to improve their work or tackle misconceptions so that they can move on more quickly in their learning.

You are meeting more frequently with teachers to discuss the progress of pupils in their class. Leaders now expect teachers to prepare for these meetings and use all the available information to identify any pupils who are underachieving. The format and recording of these meetings is still being refined in order to ensure that teachers are held to account for their work and that any underachievement is quickly tackled and appropriate interventions and support put in place.

You have encouraged teachers to include more opportunities for pupils to solve mathematical problems but you recognise that this work is not yet sufficiently embedded in daily mathematics lessons. Further guidance for teachers will be necessary to develop their skills in this area.

Governors are keen to see the school improve but acknowledge that in the past they have not been successful in halting a decline in the quality of teaching and in pupils' attainment. They have attended training and have an improving understanding of their roles and responsibilities and are now more able to evaluate information about pupils' progress. Governors visit the school regularly and have 'link governor' roles for different subjects and aspects such as English or assessment. Different governors also have a role in overseeing the progress of different priorities within the improvement plan. However, the expectations for governors in these roles are not well defined and should be clarified. The external review of governance, recommended in the previous inspection report, will take place next month. Governors are keen to use this to ensure that they are able to hold school leaders to account for their work in improving the school.

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

A new local authority school improvement advisor began working with the school in September. School leaders and governors agree that she has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. She has acted promptly to ensure that an interim headteacher is in post and is now working with governors to secure the appointment of a new permanent headteacher.

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

Yours sincerely

Morag Kophamel
Her Majesty's Inspector