

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 9153
Direct email: naik.sandhu@serco.com

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Lisa Clayton
Headteacher
Oughton Primary and Nursery School
Mattocke Road
Hitchin
SG5 2NZ

Dear Mrs Clayton

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Oughton Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 21 April 2015 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. 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 third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in January 2014. 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 Hertfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Winter
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching to good by making sure that:
 - teachers show that their expectations of what pupils can achieve are high in all classes
 - the tasks set in lessons are stimulating and interesting, and demanding but achievable for pupils
 - explanations, questioning and discussion are used effectively to ensure that pupils fully understand new work.

- Accelerate progress and raise attainment by Year 6, especially in mathematics, by:
 - spreading the best practice in the teaching of mathematics
 - extending opportunities for practical problem solving in mathematics
 - encouraging pupils to write longer pieces of work in subjects such as history and geography
 - making sure that pupils practise their numeracy skills in different subjects.

- Strengthen leadership and management by ensuring that all leaders, including governors:
 - have the skills, information and time necessary to fulfil their roles
 - are fully involved in checking the impact of new initiatives and approaches on pupils' achievement.

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

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 21 April 2015

Evidence

During this inspection the inspector met with the headteacher, four members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority, and leaders of mathematics and the provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. The inspector visited classrooms with the headteacher to scrutinise books and observe teaching and behaviour. She talked informally to pupils. The inspector also looked at information about the progress pupils make and their attainment. The inspector scrutinised the record of safeguarding checks carried out on teachers and other staff.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, one new part-time teacher has joined the school, working one day per week to support pupils that are more able. One Parent Governor has resigned and governors are currently recruiting replacement governors; a Community Governor presently and a Parent Governor in the autumn term.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have maintained the pace of improvement since the previous monitoring inspection. Teaching is more consistently effective and most pupils are focused and engaged in their learning. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are more consistently positive. The headteacher monitors the quality of teaching regularly. She receives support from the local authority and the headteacher of a local school in making robust judgements of teaching over time. Leaders have established clear expectations of teachers and provided training to improve the teaching of mathematics, English and the wider curriculum. As a result, pupils have more opportunities to solve problems in mathematics by applying their developing basic skills. Older pupils have regular opportunities to explain their answers. This helps to consolidate their learning in mathematics. Teachers provide more frequent opportunities for pupils to write at length, including in subjects such as history. However, progress in writing lags behind reading and mathematics in most year groups. Senior leaders continue to seek ways to accelerate progress in writing by learning from other schools.

Children in the Reception class have high quality opportunities to develop their independent skills and to learn how to read, write and work with numbers. The classroom and outside area are stimulating places in which to learn. Adults take every opportunity to build on children's learning by asking pertinent questions. They prompt children to use their growing knowledge during purposeful play activities, for example of the sounds letters make, to read and spell new words. The quality of provision in the Nursery class does not yet match that in the Reception class. Some

of the learning activities provided by adults do not fully promote good progress. The role-play area, for instance, is underdeveloped and children are not encouraged enough to develop early writing skills through mark-making. Leaders are aware of this and the school is receiving support from a local authority adviser to improve teaching and learning. Adults in the early years also have opportunities to observe effective practice in other schools.

The school's own data indicate that the proportions of Year 6 pupils making and exceeding expected progress will compare favourably with national averages in the forthcoming national assessments. Progress in writing is currently just below average. A higher proportion of Year 6 pupils are on track to achieve Level 4 in reading, writing and mathematics than in 2014, but the proportion of pupils likely to reach the higher Level 5 remains below average.

The headteacher and other leaders review the progress of pupils in very regular meetings with teachers. During these meetings, pupils' targets are reviewed, barriers to learning are considered and additional support is arranged for any pupils who are falling behind or failing to meet their targets. These reviews are effective in holding teachers to account for pupils' achievement and in allocating resources to secure improvements. Sometimes the particular difficulties of pupils who have special educational needs in reading, writing and mathematics are not diagnosed well enough. This means that the help they receive may not always meet their needs precisely. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are making similar progress to other pupils in the school but the gaps in attainment are not closing quickly enough. A high proportion of disadvantaged pupils also have special educational needs. Consequently, gaps in attainment for pupils eligible for the pupil premium compared with other pupils in the school are also not closing sufficiently quickly.

All pupils from Year 1 to Year 6 receive very detailed feedback on their work in teachers' marking comments. They also frequently respond to their teachers' prompts to explain their work, or complete short follow-up activities. This is making a difference. Pupils know that their work is valued and that teachers are helping them to improve it. Sometimes, however, teachers' marking does not focus on the most pressing priority for improvement, for example to use capital letters accurately in writing.

The school is currently developing its approach to assessment without levels by adopting the Hertfordshire approach. Teachers are not yet fully secure in this way of assessing pupils' progress. Further training and moderation with other schools are planned. Currently the achievement data in year groups other than the early years, Year 2 and Year 6 is not fully reliable and sometimes conflicts with the progress observed in lessons and evidenced in pupils' books.

Governors have continued to develop their skills in monitoring and challenging the school to improve. They have very detailed knowledge of the school's specific

strengths and weaknesses. The review of governance was a helpful starting point and the governing body has sought further support for improvement. Recently a national leader of governance observed a governors' meeting and provided helpful advice to improve the efficiency of the governing body. Governors have swiftly responded by ensuring that matters arising from previous meetings are addressed quickly and the outcomes are communicated effectively, so that valuable time in meetings is not wasted in covering old ground.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The headteacher has secured the support of the staff in making the necessary improvements. All staff consistently apply whole-school policies and initiatives.
- The governing body monitors and challenges the school effectively.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- New assessment procedures in some year groups do not provide the fully accurate information leaders need to check the quality of teaching over time.

External support

The local authority supports the school well. The impact of training and professional advice can be seen in the improved teaching of mathematics and effectiveness of leaders in driving improvement.