

Serco Inspections  
2 Wythall green Way  
Birmingham  
B47 6LW

T 08456 40 40 40  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Direct T 0121 683 2033  
Ann.morris@ofsted.gov.uk

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Mrs Jenny McCutcheon  
Headteacher  
Fairhouse Community Junior School  
Long Riding  
Basildon  
Essex  
IP12 1QP

Dear Mrs McCutcheon

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Thursday 19 November 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to your chair of governors, the local authority adviser and the school improvement partner for their time during the visit.

Since the previous inspection, two teachers have left the school, and newly qualified teacher and an experienced teacher returning to teaching have joined the school.

As a result of the inspection on 12-13 November 2008, the school was asked to

- Accelerate progress in mathematics by ensuring that teachers fill any gaps in pupils' previous learning
- Ensure that arrangements to monitor and improve teaching result in a higher proportion of lessons that are good or outstanding
- Ensure that classroom noise levels are conducive to effective learning
- Continue to work with parents to strengthen the partnership in children's learning.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

A number of different strategies have been applied to accelerate progress in mathematics and, together, these have led to improved pupil progress and higher standards. A combination of better quality teaching and sharply focused intervention to support those at risk of underachieving has led to a significant increase in the proportion of Year 6 pupils attaining the expected level in mathematics. This has

increased from fifty-six percent in 2008 to seventy-three per cent this year. In addition, the proportion attaining higher level five increased from thirteen per cent to twenty-three percent. These results are closer to the national average but below the aspirational targets the school set for itself. Improvements in mathematics and also in science are not matched in English where standards remain well below average; consequently the targets set for the percentage of pupils attaining the expected levels in English and mathematics have not been met. Senior leaders acknowledge that under-achievement has not been fully eradicated and that value added measures indicate that pupils' progress throughout the key stage remains significantly below national values.

Targeted support including one-to-one tuition and booster sessions delivered after school and during holiday time had a significant impact on this year's improved results. The school has clear evidence of improvement for those pupils that received this additional support. Staff training, led by the most effective practitioners in school and also tailored support from local authority consultants has increased teacher's subject knowledge, their confidence and competence. This policy of 'grow your own' is helping to build further capacity for improvement by bringing out the strengths of teachers and support staff, empowering them to take further responsibility and to lead by example. Teachers have become more adept in analysing performance data to identify where the gaps in pupils' previous learning lie and altering their planning to address these shortfalls. Lessons are planned so pupils can learn in different ways, particularly 'hands-on' practical activities done in pairs and small groups. Daily thirty-minute guided mathematics lessons compliment numeracy lessons, helping pupils of similar ability to learn together and acquire specific mathematical skills. Boys continue to out-perform girls but there are signs that this gap is closing. Teachers now ensure boys and girls have equal opportunities to contribute in lessons and a number of initiatives to raise the aspirations of girls is boosting their confidence and raising self-esteem.

Based on its own lesson monitoring, the school reports a higher proportion of good and outstanding lessons. Observations carried out jointly between senior leaders and HMI confirmed this view, particularly in older age classes but also found that good teaching is not consistent across all year groups and in some cases, some significant weaknesses remain. Self-evaluation has recognised where these weaknesses lie and what needs to be done to further increase the proportion of good and outstanding lessons. In all observations, classroom noise levels are conducive to effective learning. In the most effective lessons, there was a healthy 'buzz' as pupils shared ideas, responded eagerly to questions and helped each other with their work.

The best practitioners, including an advanced skills teacher have led improvements by modelling effective lessons and introducing new ideas and resources. For example, in numeracy lessons pupils often work independently for sustained periods of time on tasks that match their abilities and interests. They are encouraged to try different ways of working things out and decide which methods suit them the best. Most teachers use interactive whiteboards with confidence, helping to stimulate pupil

learning such as mental calculations in animated games, which pupils enjoy. Teachers' use of questioning is too variable and in some classes pupils are easily distracted by others. At times, planning does not include different activities that meet the needs of all learners during lesson introductions which means that language is often too complex or calculations are too difficult for lower ability pupils. Teacher-assistants are present in all classes and prove to be highly effective when they are deployed to teach small groups. In some lessons they are under-used and often sit through lengthy introductions without contributing to pupils' learning.

Senior leaders and have taken effective action to strengthen partnerships with parents in their children's learning. Parents are welcomed into school and an increasing number of them join class assemblies, attend parents' evenings and celebrate events with pupils. New homework arrangements, particularly the use of pupils' personal study guides and 'talking homework' are increasing parental engagement in their child's learning. Very effective monitoring by governors is ensuring that all safeguarding arrangements are in place and that school leaders are making the necessary improvements. They, and senior leaders, are demonstrating better capacity to deliver further improvements. Good partnership working with the local authority and additional resources provided by excellence cluster are helping them to secure improvement.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson  
Her Majesty's Inspector.