

## PROTECT-INSPECTION

Serco Inspections  
2 Wythall Green  
Way  
Middle Lane  
Birmingham B47  
6LW

T 08456 40 40 40  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk Direct T 0121 683 2033  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



05 November 2009

Ms Ann Mitchell  
Acting Headteacher  
Ashwood Park Primary School  
Bells Lane  
Stourbridge  
West Midlands  
DY8 5DJ

Dear Mrs Mitchell

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Ashwood Park Primary School

Following my visit with Gerald Griffin, Additional Inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 November, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in May 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Dudley MBC. I am also arranging for a copy to be sent to the newly appointed Headteacher.

Yours sincerely

Ceri Morgan

Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Ashwood Park Primary school

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 04 and 05 November 2009

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, representatives of the senior management team and governors. Every teacher was observed teaching and inspectors also observed the work of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the specialist unit for pupils with hearing impairment. Inspectors regularly sought the views of pupils, both formally and informally. The newly appointed headteacher, although not in post as yet, also met with the inspection team, as did representatives of the Local Authority.

## Context

Since the inspection in May there have been several significant changes to the leadership of the school. The headteacher resigned at the end of July and the school currently has an acting headteacher. Governors have appointed an experienced substantive headteacher who is expected to take up his post in January 2010. Several senior staff had their roles redefined and there is a new management structure in place. There is a range of additional support now in place for the school, including partnerships with other schools for professional development purposes. All other aspects of the school remain as described in the previous inspection report.

## Achievement and standards

Following the inspection in May the school passed through a turbulent period involving significant staffing upheaval during which progress on the areas for improvement did not take place. This delayed the school's recovery. However, since the appointment of the acting headteacher in September, improvement has been rapid. The school acknowledges however that, had consideration been given to school improvement earlier, progress would have been further advanced. There is also recognition that the recent improvements are heavily dependent on the expertise of the acting headteacher.

The results from the national tests in 2009 were not available at the time of the inspection but show that although around 80% of the older pupils reached the required levels in mathematics and reading less than half did so in writing and 69% in English. Of particular concern is the fact that only 7% of pupils reached the higher levels in Year 6 in writing despite pupils showing excellent attitudes to learning and demonstrating a rich vocabulary in their speech. This contrasts with mathematics in which around a third of all pupils reached the higher levels. The inconsistency is explained by a fragile accuracy of data and limited monitoring of pupil progress.

Weaknesses in pupils mathematical understanding includes an insecure grasp of basic number facts, although in the past this has been masked by frequent test

practice sessions, and an inaccurate use of precise mathematical vocabulary. This is especially in relation to data and graphing and fragile estimation and measuring skills. However a significant area of weakness in mathematics is in converting any knowledge gained into solving investigative or word problems. This is partly due to limited opportunities to do this but also capped by low writing standards.

Standards in writing remain low. The specific weaknesses are fragile sentence construction, punctuation and written vocabulary. Pupils are not often able to use spelling strategies when they are not sure how to spell a particular word. The oldest pupils are sometimes unclear about precise terminology such as what a verb or adjective is. As a result they find editing and improving their work more difficult to do.

The school now has a more systematic method for tracking pupil progress. It has highlighted that in the past teacher assessments were often of questionable accuracy. The new system uses half termly pupil progress meetings and shows achievement by each class or group of pupils. It is a welcome development to have initiated such a system but it also shows that sizeable proportions of pupils have made limited progress or even regressed, in particular in mathematics. The use made of this information is variable and some managers are unclear how to provide additional support even when they have identified which pupils are at risk of underachievement.

The targets the school has set itself for pupil progress and attainment occasionally lack ambition.

Despite the concerns outlined above, there are some recent signs of improvement. The school has implemented a helpful pupil tracking system, does now check pupil progress regularly and, although insecure on occasions, is increasingly accurate in its view. Pupils' workbooks show some signs of progress in writing and mathematics this term and in the lessons observed pupils made better, if limited, progress. The proportion of pupils reaching the required levels in English and mathematics, especially the higher levels in mathematics, show a welcome sign of improvement.

Progress since the inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Raise standards and achievement, particularly in writing and mathematics at Key Stage 2, by frequently checking the rate of progress for all groups of pupils through clearly recorded data – satisfactory progress

### Quality of provision

The pupils themselves are delightfully responsive. They show a willingness to engage and thrive on stimulating teaching. Behaviour was usually exemplary, attendance levels high and pupils are polite, responsive and articulate. They enjoy school and are proud of their work. The school is rightly proud of them as ambassadors.

Teaching observed on the visit was generally satisfactory but with some consistent limitations and occasional inadequate lessons. None was judged as outstanding. Teachers have worked hard to implement helpful lesson structures and share learning objectives with the pupils. Although these initiatives are very useful, the way they are implemented is often inappropriate. Lengthy introductory sessions dominated by teachers, with limited opportunities for pupils to show extended thinking or writing together limit pupil progress in learning. There were few examples of teachers using opportunities to improve writing skills or literacy levels in lessons in other subjects than literacy and too often they were ready to accept brief answers from pupils rather than challenge them to better their response. It remains the case that pupils still repeat lessons at the same levels that were covered in earlier years.

Other weaknesses include persistent low expectations of all pupils' capabilities and equally low levels of challenge, especially for the more able. Some of this is due to teacher's simply not asking for high enough levels of work but it is often a result of a slow pace in lessons and an undue emphasis on what teachers plan to teach rather than what pupils should be learning. In one lesson, for example, more time was spent on sharing the lessons planned objectives than on actually learning something new. The use of resources is very pedestrian with interactive whiteboards used unimaginatively and occasional use of equipment that is not suited to the task planned. This makes lessons far less engaging and although the heavy dependence on photocopied resources is now less evident, the level of challenge and excitement remains low.

A major barrier to increasing the quality and pace of learning is the timings of the school day. Too often the curriculum is planned inefficiently and the timetable interrupted at prime learning time. This means pupils waste time moving rooms unnecessarily. An example of this ineffective planning is the Golden Time on Friday afternoons when the pupils can bring in games from home. Although this is very popular with the children it is not an effective use of their time. The outcome of the weaknesses in teaching and the inefficiencies in the curriculum and timetable is that far too little time is spent on exciting learning activities.

As a result of the inefficient use of time, the contribution made by teaching assistants is variable. Those that support the inclusion of pupils with severe hearing impairment make a greater contribution to progress by providing precise and effective support. However too much of the more general support time is spent passively listening to teachers. Their work is not well directed or managed by the teachers. This represents a high level of resource offering limited value for money.

The quality of marking is satisfactory. It is up to date and generally accurate although occasionally it betrays insecure subject knowledge by the teacher, especially in mathematics. The newly established marking scheme of 'two stars and a wish' is proving an effective way of communicating both success and a development target to pupils - which they enjoy. The pupils now talk enthusiastically



about 'their targets' and the use of 'talking partners' or 'maths mates' is helping them to improve their self assessment. The sharing of 'steps to success' is also a useful way of helping pupils know what is required to move to the higher levels.

Progress since the inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Remove the inadequate teaching and raise the proportion of good teaching by improving teachers' use of assessment information in lessons so that they are able to challenge all pupils to do their best, particularly those who are more able - inadequate progress
- Give better guidance to pupils by making more effective use of marking and targets to enable pupils to know exactly what they have to do to improve - satisfactory progress

### Leadership and management

Leadership within school remains in a state of relative uncertainty. Between the last inspection and the appointment of the acting headteacher there was little strategic planning, no monitoring and evaluation of pupils progress and considerable uncertainty. The Local Authority review speaks of instability at this time. This period wasted valuable time when school improvement ought to have been a priority.

The acting headteacher has, within a short period, secured stability, a shared view of priorities and started to implement much needed changes. She is to be congratulated in bringing both stability and integrity to the work of the school. In many respects she has carried the work single-handedly since appointment. She is however, temporary. This means leadership structures in school remain uncertain and whatever changes have been implemented are unlikely to show secure improvement for some time to come.

The senior leadership team is new and of variable quality with differing levels of commitment. Some fail to see themselves as managers, remaining slow to accept responsibility for improvement. However there are also emerging signs of growth with increasingly accurate evaluation of the schools strengths and weaknesses and some signs of ambition to improve.

Governors also remains uncertain about their role. They are short of members, lack urgency and remain unsure how to challenge the schools own evaluation. They have started a programme of governor visits which is a welcome initiative. Reporting is however increasingly evaluative and the recently established school improvement committee offers an opportunity to focus on progress in the areas that require improvement. They are committed to the school and very supportive. At present however there is a limited contribution to school planning or strategic documentation. The current raising attainment plan, for example, which acts as a proxy for a school improvement plan, was largely written by external consultants and is insufficiently focussed. It requires a realignment to the main school priorities.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- Set a clear direction for the school that focuses on improvements to achievement and quality of teaching by strengthening the role of all leaders and holding all staff accountable for pupils' progress – inadequate progress despite the good work of the interim Headteacher.

#### External support

Support from the Local Authority has been generous since the last inspection. It is characterised by frequent levels of contact with a range of partners, particularly in numeracy and literacy. However, this extensive programme has proved difficult for the school to manage and it is opportune to review what is required and when. Advice has generally been of good quality but the timeliness of it has been imposed rather than agreed with the school. Despite this, the support on offer has helped maintained some stability at a time of turmoil and offers much in terms of needed professional development opportunities.

The quality of external support – satisfactory

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of teaching further by increasing the amount of time pupils spend learning, and raising the levels of challenge and ambition. In particular, enhance the teaching of literacy across all subjects and improve subject knowledge in mathematics
- Review the use of time to support learning to increase pupil involvement.
- Ensure all senior and middle managers take full responsibility for their respective remits by evaluating the appropriateness of external advice more rigorously.