

Serco
Boundary House
2, Wythall Green Way
Wythall
Birmingham
West Midlands
B47 6LW

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0121 683 2048
Victoria.mortimore2@serco.com



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Mrs Christine Spain
Wimbish Primary School
Tye Green
Wimbish
Saffron Walden
Essex
CB10 2XE

Dear Mrs Spain

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 8 December 2009 and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Thank you also to the staff and pupils who found time to speak to me and the governor representatives who came to school to hold discussions with me.

As a result of the inspection on 2 and 3 December 2008, the school was asked to:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and the progress pupils make, ensuring that the higher attainers are challenged effectively across the curriculum, particularly in mathematics.
- Improve the leadership and management of subject areas so that there is a sustained focus on raising standards and achievement.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made:

satisfactory progress in making improvements

and

satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

These improvements need to be set in the context of the staffing changes since the last inspection. One of the three class teachers, the mathematics subject leader, left in August and was replaced by a newly qualified teacher, and a second newly qualified teacher has filled the role of the Reception/Year 1 teacher who recently went on long-term leave. A new teaching assistant also joined the school this term. The headteacher has consequently had to assume a greater bulk of the school's day-to-day leadership and management responsibilities, including mathematics subject leadership, in addition to her mentoring role for new staff.



Results in the most recent national tests and assessments in 2009 rose considerably. In the Key Stage 2 national tests attainment increased from significantly below average in 2008 to slightly above the national figure. The most significant improvements were in mathematics, while increases in science and English were more modest. A similar pattern of improvement was evident in Key Stage 1 assessments in 2009. The small pupil cohorts make year-on-year comparisons unreliable, particularly as the results tend to correlate closely with the ability profile of each year group. Nonetheless, the focus on improving standards in mathematics has had a positive impact on the pupils' progress and their levels of attainment.

The school's efforts to raise standards are exacerbated, perennially, by the high turnover of pupils, most of who come from families based at the nearby army barracks. More than half of the pupils have joined the school having previously been educated elsewhere in this country or at overseas army postings. Raising standards has been a particular challenge in the Year 4/5/6 class because of specific difficulties linked with the behavioural needs of a small group of boys. The school sensibly invested additional teaching resources during the summer term to address the individual learning needs of the pupils.

The school has implemented a suitable range of strategies to strengthen teaching, and has valued the additional support provided both by the local authority and from independent consultants. Planning in each of the mixed-age classes is more sharply focused on learning objectives and the specific outcomes that pupils with different abilities should achieve in each lesson. Teaching is well structured and well managed, and lessons are more ambitious in setting work to challenge all pupils and to extend the most able individuals. This was evident in English and mathematics lessons observed where Year 2 and Year 3 pupils enjoyed the opportunity to investigate number patterns on a calendar and older pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 talked confidently about their use of alliteration and personification in their creative writing.

There has also been a sharper focus on the development and use of assessment, and a more systematic approach to monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching. Teachers have had opportunities to observe best practice locally, including a helpful partnership with a strategic support link school. The quality and impact of marking are good, particularly in English. Pupils understand what they need to do to improve and respond positively to the guidance given. Some pupils are aware that they have specific targets because they are displayed on the wall. However, the impact of target setting is underdeveloped because pupils do not always understand what the targets mean and because teachers rarely refer to them when setting out objectives or reviewing pupils' progress.

The effectiveness of school leadership, including subject leadership, has been strengthened since the last inspection, with greater emphasis on raising standards. The governing body has been very supportive, and has sensibly intensified its

monitoring role. School self-evaluation is accurate and is securely based on detailed tracking of pupil progress and regular monitoring of teaching. Evaluation of teaching is rigorous, but lesson evaluations need to focus more explicitly on the quality of learning and progress of individual pupils in each lesson.

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

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector