

Serco Inspections
Boundary House
2 Wythall Green Way
Middle Lane
BIRMINGHAM
West Midlands
B47 6LW

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



17 September 2010

Mr David Priestley
Headteacher
Thorns Primary School
Thorns Road
Quarry Bank
Brierley Hill
DY5 2JY

Dear Mr Priestley

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on Thursday 16 September 2010 and for the information provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the staff, pupils, governors and the local authority representatives for their help during the inspection.

Since the school was last inspected, there have been some staff changes. At the end of the summer term, a teacher moved to take up a teaching post in a different authority. A new teacher joined the school at the start of the autumn term, appointed as the subject leader for science and the phase leader for Years 1 to 3. Another teacher has returned following a period of long-term absence. The school has also carried out a reorganisation of the teaching staff and management responsibilities.

As a result of the inspection in January 2010, the school was asked to:

- raise attainment and improve pupils' progress, particularly in Key Stage 1
- improve pupils' rates of attendance and punctuality
- strengthen the impact of leaders at all levels on school improvement.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

There is a busy and productive working atmosphere in all the classrooms, with pupils applying themselves well to the activities planned. Teachers are clearly working to ensure that pupils make faster progress than had been the case previously. The introduction of a carefully structured phonics programme across the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is showing some promising results. For example,



by the end of the summer term 2010, a large majority of the Reception children achieved the level expected for communication, language and literacy development. Results were not quite so positive in the Key Stage 1 classes, although there was an increase in the number of Year 2 pupils attaining the levels expected by the end of Key Stage 1, particularly in writing. The school's unvalidated 2010 Key Stage 2 data shows that, although the Year 6 pupils made satisfactory progress over the key stage, the standards they reached were lower than previous cohorts and lower than average. School data shows that pupils in the other Key Stage 2 classes made satisfactory, and in some year groups, good progress. The school recognises that to close the achievement gap that currently exists, pupils need to make good progress consistently across all years.

All the observed lessons were satisfactory and many had some good features that enabled the pupils to learn and make at least satisfactory progress. In the best lessons, teachers presented pupils with practical activities that were fun and provided well organised problem-solving opportunities. For example, the Year 6 science lesson challenged pupils to find ways to separate solids from liquids and the Year 5 art lesson helped pupils to understand the concept of still life as used by the French artist, Paul Cézanne. In some classes, teachers are helping pupils to recognise the importance of having high expectations. In one class, pupils were encouraged to 'reach for the stars' and in another lesson the teacher explained that she wanted, 'fantastic writing' from the pupils. However, teachers do not always explain clearly enough what they mean, which leaves pupils unsure about what is wanted. Similarly, teachers do not always take sufficient care to ensure that they act as positive role models with their own writing, for example, when marking pupils' books and writing for demonstration purposes.

There is a strong sense of teamwork across the school and staff morale is buoyant with a 'can do' attitude. The headteacher and deputy headteacher work together well and provide good support across the school. The introduction of a regular monitoring cycle of lesson observations has raised awareness of the quality of teaching. Although actions to improve teaching are being successful there is not enough emphasis on monitoring the rate of pupils' learning in lessons. The three phase leaders are taking an increasingly important role supporting the improvement initiatives that have been introduced. This is particularly evident with the Early Years phase leader who, by working closely with the deputy headteacher, is taking responsibility for driving forward the phonics programme across Key Stage 1. The governing body is also playing an increasingly active role in supporting the school. It has been instrumental in supporting the school's work to improve pupils' attendance levels and punctuality. The impact of the school's initiatives has seen an overall improvement for the summer term 2010, with attendance rates rising to match those achieved nationally. The creation of the governing body's strategic committee, which meets fortnightly, has proved a useful mechanism to both support the school and monitor the impact of the various improvement initiatives. However, some of the reports they receive do not focus closely enough on the impact the improvement



strategies have on pupils. This reduces the governing body's ability to challenge the school and hold it to account.

The local authority has provided the school with a good level of support following Ofsted's decision to place it in a category of concern. The education improvement adviser has worked closely with the senior leaders and governing body to offer support and guidance. Also, of particular note is the successful work carried out by the authority's literacy consultant, who has been influential, improving provision and raising standards.

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

Ken Buxton
Her Majesty's Inspector

