

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

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

Direct T 01216 799154
Direct email; aidan.dunne@serco.com



10 September 2013

Nikki Mattin
Principal
Spires Academy
Bredlands Lane
Canterbury
CT2 0HD

Dear Ms Mattin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Spires Academy

Following my visit to your school on 10 September, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and trustees are taking incisive and urgent action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- improve the quality of leadership, teaching and overall achievement in mathematics.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and the Executive Principal, other senior leaders, teachers and trustees to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated a range of documentation including departmental reviews of strengths and weaknesses, improvement plans and analyses of the recent GCSE results.

Main findings

Since the inspection that took place in May, leaders have acted promptly and effectively to improve the quality of teaching within the academy. Expectations of staff, especially those with leadership accountabilities, have been clarified and targeted training for staff at all levels has been initiated. For example, teachers whose teaching has been identified as inadequate or requiring improvement have been supported to improve or have left.

During the summer term, senior leaders put together a programme of observation, target setting, training and review for identified teachers. This has yielded improvements both in the percentages of lessons judged to be good or better and the quality of marking evidenced in students' books. The programme is set to continue this term. Trustees have wisely commissioned an external evaluation of teaching to moderate leaders' judgements, scheduled to take place this term. During my discussions with teachers one person commented 'this is not a comfortable place to be for those that are unwilling to improve their teaching'.

In mathematics a rigorous programme designed to strengthen the leadership and improve overall achievement within the subject has been initiated. Mentoring and coaching have been provided for identified staff throughout the summer term, in some instances accompanied by 'hands-on' support from the Executive Principal. Although these actions were implemented immediately, they were not timely enough to benefit students in Year 11 who sat their GCSE examinations just after the inspection. Un-validated 2013 results suggest a significant decline in mathematics. Consequently, further well-judged and necessary strategies, including input from the head of mathematics at Simon Langton Grammar school whose department is judged outstanding by Ofsted, are already programmed to take place this term.

In order to improve attendance, a new Attendance Officer has been appointed. A necessary review of policy and practice has been conducted and new approaches have been implemented. Attendance data are now being routinely analysed with follow-up triggered where necessary. In particular the attendance of students at risk of under-achievement is closely monitored. Early signs suggest these approaches are beginning to yield success. For example, in the summer term the attendance of Year 9 boys eligible for free school meals, improved by 7 per cent.

A deputy headteacher has now taken charge of provision for disabled students and/or those with special educational needs. Under her direction an intensive programme of intervention designed to improve the reading of targeted students in years 7 to 9 to bring their reading in line with that of their peers, has met with significant success.

Trustees are determined to secure rapid improvements and have also re-organised the ways in which they work, both with the Principal and Executive Principal. Reporting on progress against targets for improvement is now scheduled to take

place at monthly intervals, with the expectation that leaders will have taken the appropriate and necessary actions, particularly to improve leadership and achievement in mathematics.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The academy forms part of a collaborative partnership with Simon Langton Girls Grammar school whose Principal is also the Executive Principal of the academy. Although this partnership is in its infancy, leaders within the academy are beginning to benefit from joint training events and the leadership expertise provided by the Executive Principal and other members of her senior team. In particular, the Executive Principal provides strong and effective support and challenge to the principal and senior team members, most of whom were new in post just prior to the section 5 inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Board of Trustees and the Director of Children's Services for Kent and as below.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Farmer

Her Majesty's Inspector

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Board of Trustees
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- DfE - Academies Advisers Unit [colin.diamond@education.gsi.gov.uk] – for academies