

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: 0121 679 9162
Direct email: peter.willetts@serco.com



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Najma Chaudhary
Heath Mount Primary School
Mary Street
Balsall Heath
Birmingham
B12 9ST

Dear Mrs Chaudhary

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Heath Mount Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 3 June 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. 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 February 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- take sufficient account of the work in pupils' books in forming judgements of the quality of teaching so that leaders' judgements are accurate and realistic.
- ensure action plans are informed by accurate monitoring of the quality of teaching and of pupils' progress
- ensure actions taken lead to impact on pupils' achievement.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders; two members of the governing body, including the Chair; and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A meeting was also held with the headteacher designate. The school action plan was evaluated. Short visits were made to most classrooms to talk to pupils about their learning and look at the work in their books. A number of documents were examined, including records relating to the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.

Context

You are due to retire at the end of this academic year. A new headteacher has been appointed and is scheduled to take up his post in September.

Main findings

You and other leaders have acknowledged the findings of the previous inspection and put in place plans to address the areas for improvement. These plans cover all the issues identified in the inspection and set out how you will measure the improvement taking place. Timescales are clear and you are checking whether actions have been completed on schedule. However, evaluations of the plan do not show whether there is sufficient impact on pupils' achievement. Consequently, leaders have not spotted that the quality of teaching is not improving quickly enough and plans for improvement are not sufficiently focused on the key actions needed to improve pupils' achievement.

Since the section 5 inspection, you have asked teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and have frequently observed lessons. Teachers' performance in these planned observations forms the basis of your judgements about the quality of teaching. Teachers are confident that they are teaching well. Not enough account is taken of the work in pupils' books, which shows that too few pupils make sufficiently rapid progress in order to achieve well. Consequently, teachers and leaders have an overly generous view of teaching quality. This means that leaders are not challenging teachers rigorously enough to improve. As a result, pupils' achievement is not improving quickly enough.

You have provided training and guidance for teachers and for support staff in improving the quality of teaching. Some of this is very recent so impact cannot be determined. However, some developments that have been in place for longer are not having sufficient impact on pupils' learning. For example, you have delayed the implementation of a whole-school policy on how teachers should mark pupils' work until the new headteacher is in post. In the meantime, teachers are experimenting with their own ways of improving marking. Pupils' books show this is having mixed

impact on progress because there is wide variability in the effectiveness of the approaches used. Some teachers' comments are very open-ended, so pupils do not know precisely what they need to do to improve. In one pupil's book, for example, the teacher instructed the pupil, on three consecutive days, to, 're-read your work to check it makes sense.' This comment gave no guidance as to why the work did not make sense, so the pupil did not know how to make it better. Consequently, this pupil's work showed little improvement over the week. When helpful advice is given, teachers do not always ensure pupils act upon the suggestions made, so the opportunity to make improvement is lost. In addition, teachers and other adults sometimes perpetuate errors because they misspell words when writing in pupils' books. Furthermore, class teachers do not always check that supply teachers or trainee teachers have written comments correctly in pupils' books.

You have, rightly, introduced a number of initiatives to improve the quality of pupils' writing. Teachers are expected to plan frequent opportunities for pupils to write as part of their learning in different subjects. Many teachers fail to use these opportunities effectively. Many pupils' 'topic books' include worksheets that require little intellectual effort and promote low-level writing opportunities. In the best classes, pupils' progress in writing is evident through the work they have done in lessons other than English. For example, in a Year 1 class, pupils' Religious Education books demonstrated a marked improvement in writing skills over the year.

In addition, pupils now record their best efforts in a separate book, which is aimed at enabling teachers to assess what each pupil can do and what they need to learn next. This strategy is not working well because teachers are using it inconsistently. The number of entries in these books varies dramatically over a similar time period so, for some pupils, there is too little evidence from which to make an accurate assessment of pupils' capabilities. In some classes, pupils' assessment books contain writing that has been significantly reworked and so does not necessarily represent a pupil's typical skill level. In other classes, pupils receive little guidance on their writing before it is copied into the assessment book. As a result, teachers' judgements are not based on consistent evidence which leads to varying degrees of accuracy.

Your assistant headteacher has established an effective electronic system for tracking the progress made by different groups of pupils. This has already improved the quality of information available about pupils' achievement, so has increased teachers' accountability. You and other leaders now discuss pupils' progress in greater detail and do so more frequently. Consequently leaders are better placed to instigate appropriate action for those who are falling behind. Leaders are beginning to communicate achievement information more effectively to governors. For example, the assistant headteacher has recently provided a detailed breakdown of how pupil premium funding (additional money from the government to support pupils who are eligible for free school meals, or who are in the care of the local authority) has made a difference to the pupils for whom it is intended. Nevertheless,

information about other groups of pupils is still not sufficiently detailed to ensure underachievement is rigorously challenged.

Governors are using the improved information about pupils' achievement to ask more challenging questions. However, the degree of challenge is still limited by the depth of information you provide to governors. An external review of governance, recommended at the time of the last inspection, has been instigated and is due to be completed later this term. The recommended review into the use of pupil premium funding has been completed. Leaders have taken account of its findings.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. At this visit, it was agreed that you will send HMI copies of headteacher reports to the full governing body and summary information about pupils' achievement each term.

External support

The local authority has visited the school several times since the section 5 inspection, providing support for writing the action plan and to monitor the quality of teaching. You have commissioned additional support for observing teaching from an independent consultant. Nevertheless, your views of teaching quality remain inaccurate because observers have given too little consideration to the quality of work in pupils' books when validating your judgements. This has perpetuated an overly positive view of how well teachers teach on a day-to-day basis.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for insert local authority name and as below.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy