

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

Direct T 0121 683 2033
Direct email: ann.morris@serco.com



Friday 12 March 2010

Miss Veronica Fenlon
St Mary & St John Junior and Infant School
Beaufort Road
Erdington
Birmingham
B23 7NB

Dear Miss Fenlon

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St Mary & St John Junior and Infant School

Following my visit with Alan Jones, Additional Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 March 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

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

Progress since being made subject to special measures – satisfactory
Progress since the last monitoring visit – satisfactory

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 Birmingham LA and the diocesan office.

Yours sincerely

Ceri Morgan
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special Measures: monitoring of St Mary and St John Junior and Infant School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 10 and 11 March 2010

Evidence

The inspectors observed teaching in every class at least once, met with many pupils and representatives from the governing body and the Local Authority. Separate meetings were held with the headteacher and school improvement partner and other support partners such as the National Leaders in Education, currently working with the school. Inspectors also reviewed a full range of school documentation, completed a scrutiny of pupils' work and listened to some pupils read.

Context of the school

The school is a larger than average primary school on a split site which straddles a busy main road. An increasing proportion is in the early stages of learning English. Although there has been some movement of pupils both into and out of the school since Christmas the number of pupils has been maintained at slightly fewer than 400. The school continues to experience changes to staffing although these are now almost complete with the appointment of a new Deputy Headteacher who takes up her post at Easter 2010. The school receives considerable support from external partners, including the Diocese, Local Authority and neighbouring schools. This support includes the work of a team of Advanced Skills Teachers who work in many of the classes in school.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

The school is now emerging from a period of difficulty and is improving the progress pupils make and standards in all subjects. The headteacher, staff and governors recognise that some aspects of provision are improving inconsistently however and the pace of improvement is satisfactory rather than especially rapid. Pupils are clear that they enjoy school much more now and have an enthusiasm for learning that is impressive. They are keen to do well and show a passionate commitment to their work, especially the practical elements of some subjects such as science.

Despite some concerns, standards of attainment remain below average across the school but are improving in certain key areas. These concerns are low levels of writing skills amongst the older pupils and of boys compared to girls. Too few of the more able pupils reach higher levels in their writing as a result of continued low expectations by some teachers. Writing remains weak in both key stages. The most significant improvement has been in standards of reading for all pupils which are now in line with national averages. The attention to literacy skills in all lessons is helping standards of writing also improve but there are some concerns about particular aspects of writing now emerging. The use of full sentences is, however,

now much more commonplace and the presentation of written work is improving. The quantity of work produced is much closer to what is expected and the correct use of basic punctuation is evident. There are also some examples of a delightful use of sensitive and expressive vocabulary in Year 6, particularly in one piece of writing about the memories of an elderly piano player.

Pupils show an enthusiasm for reading and text analysis. Many make valiant efforts to read with both fluency and expression. The older pupils can now discuss characterisation within texts in some detail and have an improved vocabulary to describe their thoughts.

In mathematics, a recent focus on core number skills, including learning both traditional and non traditional methods of calculation, is also beginning to pay dividends. Pupils of all ages are now more comfortable using mental arithmetic and most have a secure grasp of simple calculation, including multiplication facts and division. Increasingly pupils are able to apply these developing skills to solve a range of problems and have a secure understanding of simple algebra. An accurate analysis of pupils' gaps in mathematical knowledge has highlighted the need to develop their vocabulary of shape and space and improve skills in measurement, data handling and the understanding of graphs and charts. At present these aspects of mathematical knowledge are underdeveloped.

The 2010 targets for pupils in Year 6, if achieved, would mean that around 70% of pupils would reach standards expected for their age. The school is reasonably confident that these levels will be reached but also recognise that the assessments on which these targets are based remain fragile in accuracy. These results would be an improvement on previous years but are within grasp.

- Raise standards and increase the rate of pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the school – satisfactory progress

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Attendance levels remain inadequate with some particular and individual examples of concern. Attendance rates are currently around 90% and despite significant efforts by the school the rate is only improving slowly. A significant number of pupils have attendance rates below 80% and the school is rightly planning more emphatic action to improve attendance. The school also needs to tackle at least one particular case with urgency.

Pupils recognise the school has improved. In particular they appreciate the improved behaviour. They say that there are much fewer fights and disagreements. They also acknowledge a remaining legacy of some low level concerns about inappropriate behaviour and hope that teachers and lunchtime supervisors will take a tougher and fairer stance during breaktimes. In lessons, behaviour is generally better with good and sometimes exemplary attitudes to learning. Behaviour is closely linked to the

quality of teaching, with the better behaviour evident in classes where teaching is stronger, more interesting and relevant. Pupils remain ambitious for further improvement and hope for better games resources and playground markings at breaktimes, a wider range of clubs and out of school activities and better classroom equipment. They are right to wish for these things with the furniture in the younger classes being particularly depressing and out of date.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is improving but the rate of improvement is inconsistent. Too much of it remains stubbornly satisfactory despite efforts by the teachers. There are however some emerging strengths. The quality of lesson planning is improving and now identifies more precise learning objectives, which teachers implement well. A good use of lesson structures means that there is now an appropriate focus on core literacy and numeracy skills, with good mental and oral warm up activities evident in most classes. Teachers are working particularly hard to implement the range of advice they now receive and there is an appropriate emphasis on practical methods used to make lessons more interesting. The use of 'talk partners' to promote discussion and the interactive whiteboard technology, for example, are particular strengths. There are a few examples of good teaching and glimpses of potential in many lessons. Relationships between adults and pupils are generally good.

The quality of teaching is frequently capped however by continued over long introductions, too much teacher talk and safe rather than ambitious lesson content. This particularly disadvantages the more able, who are often frustrated by the pace of learning. It is this which is contributing to the expected low numbers of pupils achieving higher levels in forthcoming national tests. The purpose of learning activities are not always clear to the pupils, but of most concern is the tendency of some adults to imply that somehow the pupils are to blame for their limited progress. This attitude is unhelpful to improving progress.

The quality of marking remains inconsistent. In the best examples it is exemplary with up to date, constructive and diagnostic comments that help pupils make their next steps in learning. Good use of learning targets is now seen in most workbooks. In some cases however, marking is incomplete, especially in the frequent lessons covered by supply teachers. The contribution made by teaching support assistants is also variable. In one good example, pupils at an early stage of learning English were given precise and encouraging support by a multilingual support assistant. In some other lessons, assistants still sat passively through lengthy introductory periods dominated by teachers. The curriculum is now satisfactory with an appropriate emphasis on core skills. It is enhanced by some additional clubs and visits but these are limited in scope. This is a shame as pupils respond well to additional stimulus as they demonstrated in a fast paced, energetic and extremely popular session on 'street dance'. This session left pupils breathless but energised by their experience.

- Improve the quality of teaching throughout the school so that it is consistently good or better by ensuring pupils' differing learning needs are met – inadequate progress
- Ensure the school curriculum promotes enjoyment and achievement and better matches the learning needs and interests of all pupils –satisfactory progress

Leadership and management

The school senior leadership has an accurate and increasingly detailed view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This includes governance and leaders are increasingly responsive and effective in balancing support and challenge to the school. For example, senior staff have had their roles and responsibilities clarified, which will increase capacity. The required premises improvements mentioned in the last monitoring inspection have been planned. The headteacher continues to drive improvement well and shows an honest and evaluative approach. She is well aware that the remaining legacy of previous practice needs to be continuously challenged and she is ambitious for improvement. The school enjoys the expertise of a particularly effective Chair of Governors who mirrors this desire to implement a changed approach to pupil progress. She recognises the need for increased pace of change and practice, particularly in governance.

The frequency and accuracy of monitoring by the leadership team is not yet secure and it is this that has led to the satisfactory rate of progress rather than more rapid. Although improved, the monitoring of classroom practice is too infrequent and lacks precise detail. As a result it does not always lead to improvements, which is further compounded by the limited evaluation of the data generated. The school key strategic documents, for example, are not yet up to date or complete. However, recently arranged training, both for school staff and governors is much more relevant and appropriate. An enhanced team of middle leaders shows increasing signs of promise and are beginning to accept greater responsibility for their particular areas. The recently introduced pupil progress meetings are a good example of the increased precision in measuring pupil performance. This analysis does not yet focus closely enough on the relative performance of groups of pupils within school.

- Make sure that leaders and managers, including governors, rigorously monitor and evaluate the work of the school in order to bring about rapid improvement – satisfactory progress.

External Support

The school continues to receive extensive support from a wide range of partners. This support is both within classrooms and at a strategic level. There is a useful action plan produced by the partners and school leading to much more clarity about

what is expected and who is to lead on each area of improvement. The impact and quality of this support is satisfactory.

Priorities for future improvement

- Improve the proportion of teaching judged to be good by ensuring teaching a focuses more closely on the progress pupils with different learning needs make rather than teachers actions
- Improve detail and frequency when monitoring the quality of teaching and pupils' progress and use the data generated to iron out inconsistent practice across the school in lessons
- Refine the analysis of pupil progress data to show the relative performance of groups of pupils
- Improve the quality of marking to help all pupils understand what is expected of them
- Improve attendance to over 92% and chase up any particular individual pupil concerns