

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 9161
Direct email: ann.morris@serco.com



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Iain Davidson
Headteacher
Grange Academy
Halsey Road
Kempston
Bedford
MK42 8AU

Dear Mr Davidson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Grange Academy

Following my visit to your school on Thursday 19 March, 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 December 2014. 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 last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- improve the leadership of mathematics so that weaknesses in the quality of teaching and in the application of mathematics skills across subjects are addressed promptly
- check that subject leaders are monitoring their subjects effectively and that development points following the monitoring of teaching, including work scrutiny and lesson observations, are precise and quickly put into practice
- sharpen the school's action plans so that:
 - governors are clear about what needs to be done and by when
 - the intended impact of key actions is tightly focused on raising standards and accelerating pupils' progress
 - evaluation strategies indicate how governors will be involved

- opportunities for staff to develop their expertise are identified so that governors can check the cost of what is proposed and verify the difference these training opportunities make.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, senior leaders, the mathematics and English subject leaders and the special educational needs coordinator. I met ten governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body to discuss the actions taken since the December 2014 inspection. I also met the local authority school improvement adviser. You joined me on a tour of the school and we visited the classrooms for primary-aged and secondary-aged pupils. We looked at the learning environment and at pupils' work in books and on display around the school. I reviewed school documentation, in particular the new arrangements for gathering data on pupils' achievement and evidence of the monitoring of the quality of teaching. I scrutinised the school's key planning documents.

Main findings

You, with the support of staff and governors, are highly committed and determined to improve provision and standards at the school as quickly as possible so that it becomes a good school. However, the effectiveness of subject leadership is not progressing quickly enough and hampers your journey towards becoming at least good. The leadership of English is developing well. The improved use of assessment data and the detailed evaluation of the quality of teaching recorded by the subject leader show good potential to raise standards. This is because the subject leader is using her non-teaching time efficiently to drive improvement. This good practice, however, is not yet sufficiently applied across subjects, particularly in mathematics. Through your own monitoring, you have identified aspects of mathematics that require significant improvement but the impact of your feedback to staff is not yet evidenced in practice. This is a concern as developing the use of mathematics skills across the curriculum was identified as a key issue at inspection.

You recognise that further work is required to develop assessment practice and your school's action plan shows how you intend to improve the use of data. The accuracy and use of assessment require consolidation to ensure that work builds upon what pupils already understand and can do. There is still inconsistent practice across subjects and expectation of what pupils can achieve is too low. Strategies to meet the needs of more able pupils should be more clearly articulated in your plans. In addition, governors do not currently have good data with which to hold the school to account. The senior leadership team is starting to review available information on pupils' progress but it is too early to see the full impact of this work.

During my visit we discussed your monitoring of the quality of teaching. Subject leaders are not yet fully involved in this work. I saw from your observations of lessons that you provide written feedback to staff on areas of strengths and those that require improvement. However, agreed actions supported by tight timelines and

a training plan are less clear therefore you cannot be confident that the improvement points are being addressed and that the staff have the necessary confidence, subject knowledge and skills to address them. Monitoring, taking into account of all aspects of teaching, is not yet making enough difference to pupils' achievement.

The strengths identified at the time of the previous inspection are being maintained. The head of the primary school gave specific examples of good practice in teaching being shared more widely across the school. The environment for learning in the primary school is particularly inviting.

Governors are very supportive of the school and visit regularly. They bring a wide range of knowledge and expertise to the school. They are keen to refine their skills further to help them gather objective evidence of improvements, independently of your senior leadership team. However, the current assessment data is not yet entirely reliable and this limiting their ability to monitor the school's performance closely. They report that they find the improvement plans confusing and that the two separate plans are not helpful to them in monitoring progress. Governors are not yet clear about the intended impact of some actions, the proposed schedule for staff training, how they will evaluate progress made or the time it will take to see real improvement. The external review of governance, recommended by inspectors in December, has not yet taken place.

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 local authority is now visiting the school more frequently and the resultant reports accurately note where improvements are required. The full impact of their support and challenge on achievement is yet to be seen. The school has received help on developing its assessment practice and some teachers are attending an 'outstanding teaching' course. In most other aspects, the school relies on its own expertise.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, to the Department for Education - Academies Advisers Unit and to the Director of Children's Services for Bedford Borough.

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector