

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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

**Direct T:** 0121 6799169  
**Direct email:** mathew.mitchell@serco.com

27 February 2014

Paul Hill  
Headteacher  
The Isaac Newton Primary School  
Dysart Road  
Grantham  
NG31 7DG

Dear Mr Hill

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of The Isaac Newton Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 26 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm my findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

This monitoring visit was the first since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 19 – 20 November 2013.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders, a representative of the local authority and a group of pupils. I scrutinised the school's assessment records and procedures, records of monitoring activity and evaluated the local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan. I also toured the school with you and visited all the classrooms to look at pupils' learning and the quality of their work.

### **Context**

A new headteacher started at the school on 1 January 2014, together with two newly qualified teachers who were appointed before the inspection judgement in November 2013. Some restructuring of support roles has reduced the number of

teaching assistants. Shortly after the inspection, the governing body resigned en masse and although the local authority has proposed an Interim Executive Board, the Department for Education has not yet approved it. As a result, the school is functioning without a governing body at present.

The local authority arranged for an extensive review of the Early Years Foundation Stage of the school, including training in the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make). There was also a review of special educational needs provision and six teachers have taken part in the Developing Teachers Programme to improve their skills.

The local authority is proposing that the school becomes a sponsored academy and there are currently three potential sponsor organisations being considered to take it on.

### **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

The new headteacher has had a powerful impact on the school despite only having been in post for less than two months. He has brought a clarity of vision that is enabling a rapid improvement across the school's work. His evaluation of the current strengths and areas requiring improvement in the school is incisive and accurate and the plans drawn up for rapid improvement are realistic and flexible. Most significantly, he has brought a new climate of collaboration and cooperation. Teachers described feeling liberated to be more creative in their teaching and planning, more accountable and yet empowered to use their own judgement.

Teachers reassessed all pupils in January 2014. To ensure that these judgements were accurate, both testing and teacher assessments were used and teachers worked with colleagues in other schools to moderate results. This activity has enabled an accurate picture of pupils' current attainment. The way in which assessment information has been gathered and shared has been radically changed so that now all teachers can properly access it to check on the progress of their classes and individual pupils. Leaders have also, for the first time, been able to check on the progress of different groups, such as boys, pupils entitled to pupil premium funding, and disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.

Prior to January 2014, teachers marked pupils' work extensively with much detail and lengthy written comments. This had only limited value as it depended on pupils reading, understanding and remembering the comments and advice. A new policy this year is beginning to change this practice, so that less time is spent writing comments and there is more thought given to how the pupils are going to respond

to the corrections and suggestions for improvement. Pupils said that when teachers made them do corrections or extend their work, it was far more effective than written advice. Practice is still inconsistent, however, as teachers are taking time to adjust to new expectations and have yet to fully take advantage of the potential impact of a reformed approach to marking.

Pupils' writing lags behind their skills in mathematics and reading. Leaders have introduced a new whole-school approach to building pupils' skills from Key Stage 1 through to the older year groups. All the pupils interviewed were able to describe in some detail the specific skills that they are currently working on to improve their writing and there is evidence in the work produced and in the recent assessments that writing is improving. Previously, the teachers were too focused on writing and display for appearances rather than on pupils' understanding of how to convey meaning accurately. Weaker practice was still obvious in some classes where children were drafting on whiteboards rather than in their books. While this practice means that the finished writing is, sometimes, free from mistakes, it is more difficult for teachers to spot and correct errors or measure progress.

Following the local authority's review of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision, the Reception classes were reorganised shortly before this visit. The potential for learning has been greatly improved by this change. The teaching of phonics has been revised so that it is much more effective. The arrangements adopted are more suited to assisting children's learning to ensure their better progress and understanding.

The new headteacher has completely revised the school's approach to checking on the quality of teaching and managing the performance of staff. Some other leaders have worked with the local authority school improvement adviser to build their skills at observing lessons and making judgements about the quality of learning.

The behaviour observed during the inspection was good. The pupils described most behaviour as good but did give many examples where, when not supervised, it slips. The school's approaches to managing behaviour have been too focused on adult supervision and control and, as a result, pupils have under-developed skills of self-discipline. Some new approaches are being used, and the playground leaders from Year 6 explained that there was now more equipment available at playtime, but this has yet to show its full impact.

Despite the improvements that are evident in the school, there is a big backlog of underachievement, which will take some time to overcome. The present lack of a functioning governing body is also likely to be a significant impediment to the school's rapid improvement and requires urgent action.

Following the monitoring inspection, I made the following judgements:

- The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.
- The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the last Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Lincolnshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Peckham

**Her Majesty's Inspector**