

Tribal Education
1-4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524 **Direct T**0845 123 6001
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk **Direct F** 0845 123 6002
www.ofsted.gov.uk **Email** rebecca.jackson@tribalgroup.com



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Mrs S Scutter
Headteacher
Hillcroft Primary School
Chaldon Road
Caterham
Surrey
CR3 5PG

Dear Mrs Scutter

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Hillcroft Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 January 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to staff and the pupils.

A significant number of changes have occurred since the last inspection. A new headteacher and new deputy headteacher have been appointed and took up their posts from September 2010. A new chair of governors was appointed from within the governing body shortly after the last inspection. New teachers have been appointed in both key stages. The published admission number has been increased in the Early Years Foundation Stage for one year at the request of the local authority and changes have been implemented so children can attend the nursery all day for parts of the week. The school is at full capacity in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 for the first time in a number of years.

As a result of the inspection on 14 and 15 October 2009, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made:

good progress in making improvements

and

good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.



The new senior leaders have quickly created a cohesive team with complementary skills that have resulted in rapid and positive changes in provision and in outcomes for pupils. Staff spoken to say everyone is 'working together' to improve and they feel more involved in setting the strategic direction of the school. The headteacher has been proactive in creating links with outstanding primary schools and securing mentoring from the headteacher of one. Leaders have visited the schools and staff have already adopted practices such as 'every 10 minutes count' to effectively inject pace and urgency into lessons and pupils' learning.

Attainment by the end of Key Stage 2 in 2010 showed a decline, particularly in mathematics, and remained significantly below average overall. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 1 remained broadly the same as at the last inspection. School data show that a large number of pupils identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities joined the class during Year 6, which adversely affected standards. The attainment of pupils who had been at the school for two years or longer was close to the national average. The new senior leadership team has taken robust and decisive action to improve attainment and pupils' progress following a thorough analysis of the school's work.

Work observed in lessons, books and school data indicate that pupils across all age groups have made rapid progress and most are now reaching the expected levels of attainment in both English and mathematics. A good proportion of Year 6 pupils are working above the expected levels. This is a result of a large number of initiatives that have been introduced since the last inspection and embedded swiftly, that have stimulated and created a more positive attitude and excitement in learning. Pupils want to succeed. They particularly enjoy opportunities to write the class mascot diary and to participate in the 'Big Write'. Positive changes have occurred in teachers' understanding and use of assessment information to support learning. This has raised expectations, especially in relation to pupils' starting points, and is being used effectively to plan a broader range of activities to meet the needs of pupils with different levels of ability. Good use is made of targets and self- and peer-assessment activities so pupils understand how well they are doing and what they are aiming to achieve. Pupils talk enthusiastically about attaining their targets through 'reach for the stars'. This has helped raise pupils' motivation and aspirations well. However, not all pupils are secure in knowing the next steps in their learning. Senior leaders have introduced a programme of pupil progress meetings to hold staff more to account for the progress pupils make in their class.

Significant changes have occurred across the school in providing creative activities that have increased pupils' knowledge and understanding of the wider world, to better match pupils' interests and to bring more immediate relevancy to their work. For example, when learning about the Nile during work on the Egyptians, recent flooding in Australia was used to promote discussion and implications for people's lives.



Developments in the Early Years Foundation Stage have been supported well by a local authority consultant with robust action taken to improve provision. This has led to improvements in the outdoor environment and has ensured a broad range of high quality activities are provided for children in both the Nursery and Reception classes. Teaching is consistently good, especially in the use of open-ended questions by all staff to stimulate children's curiosity about the world around them and to promote speaking and listening skills. This is leading to better progress. Assessment has been strengthened and is used well to recognise and record children's learning and to plan future activities to meet their needs, especially for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The local authority has provided good support, particularly in the development of the Early Years Foundation Stage, including participation in a project on transition to Key Stage 1. Professional development activities have been provided on early intervention that are leading to increased and effective use of booster work to support pupils identified as below expectations. This includes developing the role of teaching assistants to support learning.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Judith Rundle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2009

- Raise teachers' expectations of what their pupils can achieve by ensuring they use assessment to plan and provide tasks which accurately reflect the interests and abilities of all pupils.
- Raise the aspirations of pupils by increasing their knowledge and understanding of the wider world.
- Increase the quality and range of outdoor activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that children are even more stimulated and progress is accelerated.