

Tribal Education  
1-4 Portland Square  
Bristol  
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231

Text Phone: 0161 6188524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Direct T 0845 123 6001

Direct F 0845 123 6002

Direct email: sarah.cartlidge@tribalgroup.com

13 December 2010

Mr P Pritchett  
The Acting Headteacher  
The Coombes CofE Primary School  
School Road  
Arborfield  
Reading  
Berkshire  
RG2 9NX

Dear Mr Pritchett

### **Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of The Coombes Primary School**

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 7 December 2010 and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please extend my thanks to the pupils and to the chair of governors, as well as the representatives from the local authority, who gave time to speak to me.

As a result of the inspection on 1 and 2 July 2010, 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 is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

The pupils' work shows that pupils are making better progress, in some cases good, over recent weeks and months. There are clear indications in some pupils' work that pupils are beginning to build systematically on what they already know and are able to do. However, inconsistency remains. Pupils in Key Stage 2 are divided into three ability groups for English and mathematics. Lesson observations, the pupils' work and the school's records indicate that pupil progress is slower in some of these groups. This is due mainly to less than effective teaching and is particularly the case in Years 4 and 6. Pupils, spoken to during this inspection, report that they enjoy their mathematics lessons more than they used to because they receive better help with their work. Policies are in place to improve pupils' understanding of their progress, presentation of their work and what pupils must do to improve. The policies are new and not yet rigorously integrated into all teachers marking. However, pupils' imagination has been captured by the mantra of 'tickled pink' (to

show good work) and 'yucky yellow' (to highlight what they need to do to improve). Some pupils could explain the teachers' marking and show where they had tried to make their work better. Although identified areas for improvement were not always followed up in subsequent marking. The curriculum for mathematics is strengthening. Timetables now reflect a greater allocation to mathematics than at time of the previous inspection. Some teachers ensure that classrooms are calm and industrious places to work. These have a language-rich environment, are well organised and have high-quality pupil work on display. However, this is not consistent across the school.

Monitoring of teaching by the school, the local authority and inspection evidence indicate that teaching is at least satisfactory and improving. There is a steadily growing proportion of good teaching. In the lessons observed, some teachers have clearly taken on board the new initiatives introduced by the school. Where teaching is strong, lessons are well prepared, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are high and relationships are very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They use their detailed knowledge of individual pupils' needs to support their planning. Tasks are often practical and collaborative work helps pupils to link challenging concepts. Good practice in questioning skills exists. For example, key questions are identified to elicit pupils' understanding and are used to engage pupils in high quality dialogue. In the less effective lessons, teachers do not always introduce lesson objectives successfully and these objectives are often couched in jargon which is difficult for pupils to understand. In particular, teachers spend too much time talking, allowing insufficient time for pupils to develop their speaking skills or explore issues for themselves and consolidate their understanding.

Most teachers are becoming better at assessing the progress pupils make. There are instances when teachers use perceptive questioning to establish what pupils have learned and remembered. However, not all staff make sufficient use of this information to prepare and modify work so that it presents an equal level of challenge for all pupils. Consequently, assessment does not adequately support pupils' learning. Since the last inspection, rigorous procedures have been implemented for tracking pupil progress. For example, half-termly meetings are held between teachers and senior leaders to check on individual pupils' progress, to inform decisions regarding intervention groups and to address underachievement in specific areas. The development of these clear systems for monitoring pupils' progress, together with well-focused support to meet the needs of pupils, is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress.

Safeguarding arrangements are secure and the acting headteacher has worked hard and to good effect to ensure the school now complies with health and safety legislation. Appropriate policies are in place and the school site is secure. For example, movement into and out of the school is now through a central place and external fencing has been repaired or replaced. Most pupils spoken to during the inspection said that they feel very safe at school. Pupils move sensibly around the very large school site and are polite and courteous.

The acting headteacher has targeted the support provided by the local authority to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the school and what needs to improve. He has to take the responsibility for leading nearly all aspects of the school, for example in monitoring and evaluating provision. This means that his impact on teaching and learning overall is less effective than it could be because the school lacks senior leadership capacity. Staff demonstrate a greater readiness to embrace improvements and change, resulting in greater optimism and an increased commitment to further progress. Discussions with middle managers indicate that they have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities and are fully aware of the need to change the culture of the school to one where the focus is firmly on good learning. They are eager to develop their leadership role further; as yet they do not formally observe teaching. This limits how they can support teachers in their subjects and promote improvement. The governing body understands the need for improvement in a number of areas. They have given the headteacher a clear mandate for change but have yet to develop a rigorous system by which they can monitor developments and hold senior staff to account.

Senior leaders are positive about the support provided by the local authority which has led to some improvements in provision and resources. The School Improvement Partner is well informed about the work of the school and the impact of the actions taken. The local authority has revised the statement of action, which now meets requirements. The challenge for the school now is to ensure that the pace of improvement is further increased and that good practice is embedded into the life of the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Kekshan Salaria  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2010**

- Take steps, as a matter of urgency, to ensure that all aspects of safeguarding requirements are met in the main school and in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Ensure that pupils make at least the expected level of progress in mathematics as they move through the school by:
  - allocating a higher proportion of curriculum time to the teaching of mathematics
  - increasing opportunities for pupils to record their work systematically.
- Implement a more rigorous monitoring programme by senior leaders to ensure:
  - more effective teaching, with higher expectations, particularly in Years 3 to 6
  - more rigorous marking of pupils' work
  - better use of individual targets to take pupils' learning forward at a brisker pace.