

Tribal
1-4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0117 3115319
Direct F 0117 3150430
Direct email: matthew.parker@tribalgroup.com

20 September 2012

Mrs A Allison
The Headteacher
Park Mead Primary School
Upper Dicker
Hailsham
East Sussex
BN27 3QP

Dear Mrs Allison

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of Park Mead Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 19 September 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. May I thank, in particular, the new Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body for attending meetings and pupils for speaking to me during the course of the day?

As a result of the inspection in January 2012, 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 pupils' achievement.

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills broadly in line with those expected for this age. Over the last three years there has been consistent improvement in the progress they make. In a lesson observed, the class teacher and her assistant ensured a buzz of conversation, supporting children in acquiring language skills, to help compensate for those children who are less confident in communicating. Pupils' progress in Key Stage 1, however, slowed, and results in national tests this year declined compared to others nationally and to previous results and the school's own targets. The size and nature of the group who took the tests make it difficult to make direct comparisons with national averages. Nonetheless, issues still remain with the quality of teaching and consistency of achievement for this group of pupils.

Teachers' assessments for pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 for May 2012, for which there are currently no validated results, show that two thirds of pupils made slightly better progress than that expected nationally, particularly so in writing. More pupils than previously were on track to exceed the nationally expected Level 4 in reading.

This improving picture is due to concerted support for the teaching of writing and recent support for the teaching of reading from the local authority and from within the school. The government's floor standards, which set minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress, are likely to be met this year when national results are validated later this term. Pupils with disabilities or with special educational needs achieve as well as their peers, with some reaching nationally expected levels especially in English. Steady improvements have been made in planning, with nearly all lesson plans showing clear learning intentions and ways of judging success, which teachers and pupils alike use to judge their success in learning. In a Years 5/6 lesson, good use was made of a simple grid showing how pupils could use the success criteria for the lesson in order to check their work and the work of a partner. In most lessons, there is increasing evidence of teachers appreciating the need to challenge all groups of learners.

Pupils say that lessons are now more interesting and, as a result, they show much better attitudes to learning. During lessons teachers are beginning to give pupils more opportunities to practise and reinforce their skills in literacy and numeracy. In some cases, these opportunities are given when pupils are carrying out independent tasks and teachers do not always check that pupils understand exactly what they have to do and whether they are capable of such independent practice or reinforcement. In a Years 3/4 mathematics lesson, pupils were given opportunities to work independently at solving subtraction problems, but because one or two did not have sufficient understanding, they worked for some time making simple mistakes.

The curriculum has improved, with the school now much clearer on how to manage work for mixed-age classes over a two-year period. Long and medium term plans are being developed in collaboration with external consultants. Although this work has not been finished, pupils appreciate the more compact and interesting nature of topics which they feel are now set up on smaller timescales, giving them much more chance of completing their work and feeling a greater sense of achievement.

The new executive headteacher is being very ably supported by the existing head of school. Their partnership, although very recently created, is already accelerating quicker progress in improvement than previously had been the case, and has already carried out insightful monitoring and evaluation work in such areas as teaching and learning and achievement. It has shown the quality of teaching to be typically satisfactory, confirmed by the monitoring visit, but including some weaker teaching, not seen on the visit. The school is currently below the target set for it in the local authority's single plan for improving teaching, and leaders realise the need for a faster rate of improvement. To this end, the local authority has already discussed plans to refocus the plan with changes of emphasis and timescales in order to secure quicker improvement. The plan itself is well constructed and the officer responsible for the plan meets with leaders regularly to monitor and evaluate progress. Aspects of the plan which already show some success are the support for the teaching of reading, writing and assessment. The role of middle leaders has improved slowly as

some leaders have left or have been only recently replaced. Improvements have been seen in information and communication technology (ICT), where the curriculum has been revised with more success. As a result, pupils' progress is improving and the leader is beginning to understand more clearly where the strengths and weaknesses of the subject lie. However, subject leaders other than for literacy and ICT have yet to show clear ideas of how pupils' learning in their subjects might be improved. Opportunities to observe colleagues teach in mixed age classes at other schools and to note the work of middle leaders have not yet been organised.

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

Gavin Jones
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2012

- Raise pupils' achievement, particularly in Key Stage 1, by making sure teachers' planning offers the right challenge for all groups of pupils in all lessons.
- Improve opportunities for learning for all pupils by ensuring that changes made in the curriculum are embedded in all classes so that:
 - pupils are given the maximum opportunities to practise and reinforce their skills and learning in English and mathematics
 - the exciting and relevant activities that are linked across subject areas are present in all lessons.
- Ensure that leaders and managers accelerate the pace of improvements by:
 - extending opportunities for staff to observe the best practice in the school
 - monitoring and evaluating all initiatives so that effective practice becomes embedded and any remaining inconsistencies are eliminated
 - giving middle managers opportunities to develop teaching and learning so that they can provide targeted support for staff.