

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 311 5359
Direct F 0117 315 0430
Email: christina.bannerman@tribalgroup.com

20 September 2013

Mrs Jane Fendley
Headteacher
St Mark's CofE Primary School
Manor Road
Brighton
East Sussex
BN2 5EA

Dear Mrs Fendley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mark's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 September 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the overall purpose of action planning, which is to improve achievement for all, is clearly stated so that the success of each action can be regularly reviewed against its impact on achievement
- include pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding, those with higher ability and those with high levels of mobility in the groups of pupils for whom targets are regularly set and monitored

Evidence

During my visit, I had a discussion with your local authority adviser and looked at plans and records, including the post-Ofsted action plan. I also met the Chair and other members of the governing body. I particularly appreciated the discussions that I was able to have with you, your deputy and special educational needs co-ordinator, and the opportunity to have a tour of the school. It was helpful to be able to consider with you the progress made by pupils and the information available about attainment and target setting for this academic year.

Context

As a result of a significant building programme, the school environment has changed considerably since the recent section 5 inspection. Some staff changes have been made and there is a new Early Years Foundation Stage leader.

Main findings

You, your senior leaders and members of the governing body were already aware of the need to take action on the areas for improvement that were identified at the recent inspection. However, you used that experience well to move the school forward more rapidly. Your action plan is clear about the steps needed to bring about improvement and many of these are having impact already. However, actions are not linked clearly enough to the intended impact on pupils' achievement for you and the governors to be sure that they are working as effectively as possible.

Too many pupils in Key Stage 1 failed to make progress at expected or above expected rates in the previous academic year. You are aware that, because the quality of teaching was inconsistent, the levels of attainment reached by the Year 6 leavers were also below the national average. With support from the local authority you are clearly taking action to prevent this happening again this year. Pupils currently make less progress in writing than they do in mathematics and reading. However, you have made a strong start on raising the profile of writing across the school. You recognise that more work needs to be done to ensure that speaking and listening opportunities are created to support writing at an appropriate level for each pupil. You are collecting useful information on most groups. It is important that the progress of all groups of pupils, including those with high ability and those who leave or join the school outside the usual starting times, is regularly reviewed so that none are left behind.

Decisive action has been taken to raise the quality of teaching including, where necessary, to remove weaker elements. Swift action has also been taken to improve the overall provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Good opportunities are being provided for teachers to learn from each other and from

other schools, and for all teaching assistants to begin a programme of continuing professional development. Changes to the learning environment are benefitting all classes as well as those pupils who need focused one-to-one or small group sessions. The idea of working within a 'learning circle' is helping pupils to become more independent; they are responding well to the idea of 'spotlights', used to point out different ways they could be working. It was encouraging to see Year 6 pupils settling quickly to their tasks with very little prompting from a teacher.

Governors have continued to build upon their existing strengths to challenge as well as support the school. Members are clear about their roles and responsibilities and the Chair of Governors in particular acts as a very strong partner-member of the senior leadership team. School improvement planning is detailed and actions to be taken are clear and known by all. However, there is more emphasis on the steps to be taken than on the targets for achievement and this makes it difficult for governors to monitor the success of the plan and the impact it is having.

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 has been extremely active in providing and brokering support and challenge for the school. Financial as well as professional support has meant that you have been able to implement and sustain a number of strategies for improvement. You are rightly working to ensure that the capacity to continue improving remains, if and when local authority support lessens. Regular visits from the school partnership adviser are providing a good means of monitoring the impact of the initiatives used. Membership of the local cluster of schools, and access by staff and governors to the city centre partnership, are providing good opportunities for you and your staff to learn and work with colleagues outside your school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Brighton and Hove and the Diocese of Chichester.

Yours sincerely

Anne Duffy
Her Majesty's Inspector