

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

15 October 2013

Miss Margaret Pease
Headteacher
Southwood Primary School
Keppel Road
Dagenham
RM9 5LT

Dear Miss Pease

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Southwood Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 October 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 not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- ensure that the external review of governance is completed as a matter of urgency and the recommendations are acted on immediately, so that governors can begin to offer support and challenge to school leaders more effectively
- sharpen the school improvement plan so that those responsible for monitoring and evaluation can judge how effective actions have been, using clear success criteria, appropriate time scales and accurate achievement data

- monitor and evaluate how the new interventions for improving writing skills are making a difference, to ensure all pupils are making better progress.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior and middle leaders, the Chair of Governors together with two other governing body members and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated, along with other school documents. You also took me on a short tour of the school.

Context

Some staffing changes have occurred since the inspection. Two teachers left the school at the end of the summer term, including the teacher responsible for managing inclusion. You have successfully appointed replacements who took up their posts in September, including two newly qualified teachers and two temporary teachers. Two additional teachers have been employed to teach the new classes created by the school increasing in size. You have also employed additional teaching assistants to support pupils. The governing body has several new members but there are still some vacancies that have arisen since the inspection. You have made changes to the school day to make better use of the available teaching time.

Main findings

The school improvement plan is not fit for purpose. It identifies the actions that need to be taken but it is not always clear who is responsible for specific actions and who will check that they have been carried out. This means that the rate of improvement is not being monitored closely enough. The roles of the governing body and local authority in supporting, monitoring and evaluating improvements need to be made clearer, so that they can hold school leaders more strongly to account. Data tracking systems need to be used to inform the improvement plan so that the impact of actions can be measured more accurately. Timescales and milestones need to be included so that you can check what still needs to be done. This will enable you to agree further priorities and ensure that more rapid progress is being made.

Leaders at all levels are clear about the improvements that are necessary to ensure that the school is judged as good at the next inspection. However, they do not yet track the impact their actions are having or ensure that any outcomes are fed back to the main school improvement plan. This means middle leaders are sometimes working in isolation and the pace of improvement slows.

School leaders have moved quickly to ensure that writing standards throughout the school can improve. Staff training has taken place and focused interventions are beginning to be used to good effect. Leaders are aware that they need to measure the impact of these interventions more carefully so that further support can be adjusted as necessary.

Governors are not able to ask challenging questions because they are not yet clear about their roles and responsibilities. They recognise that they have a bigger role to play in the school's strategic leadership. They are committed to making a difference and know that they need to work more closely with school leaders. However, the delay in arranging the external review of the governing body has meant any recommendations still need to be implemented. Therefore, the governing body is still not in a position to support school leaders in making rapid improvements.

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 appointed a new link advisor who will start working with you soon. They have also provided consultancy support and additional funding for staff training in raising achievement and in improving teaching skills. Training for teaching assistants in supporting small group work in mathematics has also been taken up. An external consultant has been employed to help you raise standards in writing across all year groups. You consider that this support has been of a good standard and is helping the school to improve. Further support and training is being arranged that will include working more closely with other local schools. This will include opportunities for teachers to observe good and outstanding teaching. The delay in arranging this has meant that some teachers have not improved as quickly as they could have.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Barking and Dagenham.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Cox
Her Majesty's Inspector