

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

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Peta Collicot
Headteacher
Hermitage Primary School
Hermitage
Thatcham
Berkshire
RG18 9SA

Dear Mrs Collicot,

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hermitage Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 23 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 October 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:

- strengthen the school improvement plan by separating monitoring and evaluation activities and ensure external evaluations are clearly identified.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated along with minutes of governing body meetings, notes of visits from local authority officers

and a range of other documents. I visited every class with senior leaders during a learning walk.

Context

Since the last inspection a new Chair of Governors has been appointed and one further governor has joined the board.

Main findings

The school had recognised the need to improve teaching prior to the full inspection in October 2013 but action taken was too recent to demonstrate improvement. Since the inspection, improvements have gathered momentum and are being strongly led by the headteacher and senior team. An example of this is the revised policy for improving consistency and quality in teaching. This is raising expectations for all staff and making them accountable for their own performance, through for example, the review meetings held every six weeks where they are required to show evidence of pupils progress in work books. In addition, a robust structure of support and challenge for teachers has been established for those not performing consistently well.

The school improvement plan identifies what needs to be improved in detail. It articulates clearly the work being undertaken at the school to bring about the necessary improvements for example to ensure pupils learn effectively. Precise pupil achievement targets are indicated to demonstrate the key steps on the school's journey to becoming good. The sections on how the school, local authority and governors will monitor and evaluate the success of the plan require this similar level of clarity. Evaluations from external sources are also needed so governors can carefully check if the plan is working.

The revision of the mathematics curriculum has rightly focussed on pupils' use of practical resources, models and visual images to support their learning. New approaches to curriculum planning are helping to improve pupils' standards of writing. The recent science week, including the arrival of an alien egg, has stimulated pupils' interests. These steps are improving boys' attitude to learning in particular. Pupils are now more aware of their targets and next steps in learning because of the new approaches to providing marking and feedback.

The governing body responded positively to the inspection by arranging their own external review and action plan. Regular meetings between the chair and the headteacher are providing more opportunities to challenge the work of the school. Learning walks and activities to gather first hand evidence by link governors are now well established. Governors have a very good grasp of the success of initiatives to improve teaching and of the expectation and urgency required by all staff in order to

become good. Governors recognise that the use of external evaluations would enable them to contribute even more strongly to school developments.

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

Support from the local authority started before the inspection and played a significant part in attracting and appointing the deputy headteacher as well as beginning to raise pupil standards. Further training for teachers on how children learn effectively has also been beneficial. Independent, termly reviews of the school improvement plan, attended by the Chair of Governors ensure that all parties continue to keep a close eye on the key priorities. On-going support is well matched to the school's needs and clearly identified in the plan.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Light
Her Majesty's Inspector