

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 5307
Direct email: rachel.evans@tribalgroup.com

24 January 2014

Mr Blackburn
Headteacher
Fordcombe Church of England Primary School
Fordcombe Green
Tunbridge Wells
TN3 0RY

Dear Mr Blackburn

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fordcombe Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 24 January 2014, 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 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:

- check the quality and frequency of marking in pupils' books more regularly to ensure there is a consistent approach
- further develop the skills of teaching assistants through training, in order to strengthen their contribution in lessons
- evaluate the use of questioning in lessons so that its impact on learning can be measured.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the Chair of the Governing Body. I also had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I evaluated a range of documentation including the school improvement plan and information relating to the monitoring of teaching. You also took me on a tour of the school and brief visits were made to all classrooms.

Context

Since the last inspection one teacher has left the school and a newly qualified teacher has been appointed on a part-time basis.

Main findings

The judgements made at the previous inspection were accepted by yourself and the governing body. You and your deputy headteacher have quickly focused on the most important areas identified for improvement and you are determined to move the school forward. The school improvement plan is detailed and clearly structured to show how each area is being tackled, who will monitor progress and how and when it will be measured. You have broken down this plan further into a week-by-week progress chart to show actions that need to take place in classrooms, monitoring by school leaders and governors and where appropriate, parental involvement. As a result, everyone involved is given a very clear overview of your intentions.

You have a good understanding of the quality of teaching across the school and where improvements still need to be made. There has already been some useful staff training to develop and support teachers and evidence shows that this is having a positive impact in a number of areas. Teachers are clearer about what they need to include in their planning and marking. As a result, most planning is detailed and shows how work is set at the right level for different pupils. Your monitoring of this planning is ensuring that a consistent approach is being established.

There has been an increased focus on making sure teachers provide clear feedback to pupils on how to improve their work. The standard of marking is improving and children are responding more frequently to their teacher's comments. However, some inconsistencies remain in how the marking policy is being used. The training you have provided to teaching assistants has begun to further develop their skills and contribution to lessons. Your plan to continue this training, including in the marking of some pupils' work is an appropriate way to further support improvements.

Teachers have received valuable training about the use of questioning to develop pupils' understanding. More rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the use of questioning during lesson observations would enable you judge the impact it is having on pupils' learning in more detail.

Pupils are more aware of their achievements and their next steps in learning through the introduction of 'target books' for literacy. Pupils are able to discuss their targets and evidence of progress is being collected from a variety of subjects. You have prioritised the introduction of a similar system for mathematics as a next step.

Governors are committed to improving the school and use information about pupil performance well to check standards. The governing body have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and use this to challenge and support senior leaders in a suitable manner. They are now rightly planning a series of visits to the school to collect first-hand information about its work. This will increase their knowledge and enable them to ask informed questions about pupil progress and the actions the school is taking.

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 provided useful advice for writing and refining the school's long and short-term plans. It has arranged mentoring support from the headteacher of a local outstanding school which has been a valuable source of guidance and challenge.

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

Yours sincerely

Lisa Moore
Her Majesty's Inspector