

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 5323
Direct email: suzy.smith@tribalgroup.com

23 May 2014

Mr John Gadd
Headteacher
Thomas A Becket Middle School
Glebeside Avenue
Worthing
BN14 7PR

Dear Mr Gadd

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thomas A Becket Middle School

Following my visit to your school on 22 May 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 January 2014. 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:

- improvement plans include clear targets for pupils' progress, especially for the groups identified in the inspection report: pupils with special educational needs or disabilities, and those supported through the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils eligible for free school meals, in the care of the local authority, or with a parent or carer in the armed services)
- the school measures the success of these plans by checking to see that pupils' progress improves as a direct result of the action taken.

The local authority should take further action to:

- maintain high levels of challenge to the school in meetings which review the school's improvement
- support the governing body to commission a senior partner to work alongside the headteacher, to provide external challenge and support.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and the three assistant headteachers. Together we made brief visits to classes in all year groups. I also met with the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, and with a representative of the local authority. These meetings were to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I examined a range of documentation. This included the school's improvement plans, records of governing body meetings, records of local authority visits, information about year team meetings and how teaching is checked within year teams, the recent review of special educational needs provision and some examples of marking in pupils' workbooks.

Context

Since the inspection, one newly qualified teacher has left the school, replaced by an experienced teacher.

Main findings

Since the inspection you have set clear expectations for pupils' progress, based on their achievement when they were aged 7. This is a significant change from previously, when teachers set targets and measured progress from the start of each school year. As a result, teachers now focus more sharply on their pupils achieving the progress expected nationally between the ages of 7 and 11. Teachers I spoke with understood this different approach and they were able to tell me how the systems you have introduced since the inspection help them to identify pupils who need to catch up.

The school will become a junior school in September 2015. It was clear in the classrooms I saw, that you successfully promote a "primary" approach to learning in Years 4, 5 and 6. Prominent displays focus on aspects of core learning in reading writing and mathematics, at increasing levels of difficulty. This structured approach is supporting better progress for all pupils as they move towards Year 6, especially for those with special educational needs.

The inspection report recognised examples of good teaching and you are building on these with opportunities for teachers to observe one another and have structured discussions about how they teach. You have introduced a programme designed to make "good" teaching "great". You are developing the way the school checks the quality of teaching so that these judgements are based on more than one visit to any classroom. However, you acknowledge that these checks do not yet focus sharply enough on the progress being made, especially by pupils with special educational needs or disabilities and those supported by the pupil premium. Your current judgement of the quality of teaching is that at least 85% is good or better. Unless you have good evidence that pupils' progress has improved significantly since the inspection, especially for these groups, it is difficult to justify this evaluation.

You have extended the role of year group leaders. They now observe teaching and give feedback about the strengths and weaknesses they find. They also lead regular team meetings. However, neither these observations, nor the team meetings, feature a strong enough focus on groups of pupils, especially those whose progress needs to improve.

Since the inspection, the school has looked into the way it supports pupils with special educational needs, and produced an action plan. A stated aim of the review was to examine the progress these pupils make. However, there is no reference to their progress in the report produced for the leadership team, and there are no clear targets for improving their progress in the action plan.

You have organised a review of the school's marking policy. The new document states clearly that the purpose of teachers' feedback to pupils is to support their progress. In one of the classrooms I visited, I saw a teacher using their planning and preparation time to provide detailed individual feedback to a pupil, marking their work while they discussed this. In the exercise books I examined, I saw clear evidence that teachers are now providing accurate and helpful feedback through their marking, and that you have introduced sessions for pupils to consider this advice and to respond.

You are steering this work through the school's improvement plan. There are links between the overall plan and the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report. However, specific action plans do not focus sharply enough on the reasons given in the report, for why the school is not a good school. The plan does not feature clear enough targets for the progress pupils should make, and there are no specific targets for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities, or those supported by the pupil premium. How governors will check the actions in the plan, and how they will measure the success of these actions in improving progress, is also unclear. Although staff meetings include a range of training for staff, professional development does not feature strongly enough as a strategic element of the improvement plan.

The governing body is fully committed to support and challenge the school to improve. They know the school well and their visits to the school include attending staff training and meetings. The vice-chair is undertaking national training in preparation for taking up the leadership of the governing body. Governors have conducted a useful review of their skills and have devised a strategic plan to improve the way they work. Governors considered the inspection findings and the school's improvement plan, but these discussions were not recorded in enough detail. As a result, there is insufficient evidence that the governing body is holding you to account for leading improvement. Governors are rightly supportive of your approach to sharing and developing leadership in the school. We agreed the additional value of you receiving the high level of external challenge and support, which your role requires at this time.

External support

Although the local authority identified a decline in the school's performance, the inspection took place before this was discussed with the headteacher. Since the inspection, the local authority has supported the writing of the improvement plan and then checked its implementation. However, these discussions lacked a sufficiently high level of challenge, so that some of the key weaknesses identified in the plan were not addressed by the school.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Siân Thornton
Her Majesty's Inspector