

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 F 0117 315 0430
Email: rachel.evans@tribalgroup.com

8 July 2014

Mr A Clark
Interim Executive Headteacher
Elaine Primary Academy
Elaine Avenue
Strood
Rochester
ME2 2YN

Dear Mr Clark,

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Elaine Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on Tuesday 8 July 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 April 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:

- develop the effectiveness of middle management, particularly in mathematics
- strengthen the work already done to improve teaching by focusing more closely on where it is not yet good.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and other senior leaders, members of the local governing body and representatives of the Williamson Trust who sponsor your academy, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans were evaluated along with your self-evaluation of the school. I looked at minutes from recent governor meetings. We completed short visits to

classrooms together with the Head of School, during which I spoke to some pupils and looked in their books.

Context

Since the academy was inspected the Head of School has gone on maternity leave and there is now an acting Head of School who has been appointed from within the school's current leadership team. The recently appointed Executive headteacher has already been working with the school. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed to start in September. Some key staff, such as the subject lead for literacy, are leaving at the end of this academic year.

Main findings

Since April, you and the Head of School, have taken effective action to improve the areas recommended in the previous inspection report. You are under no illusion that there is much still to be done if the school is to become good.

Your school development plan rightly has improving teaching as its first priority. The activities planned have already begun to have an impact. For example, your work on the school's marking policy has started to bring consistency in how teachers feedback to pupils. As one year 3 pupil put it, 'I can now see what I need to do to get better at my writing'. We also saw how teachers are making better use of the information they have about how their pupils are doing to help plan work at the right level for all pupils.

During our short visits to classrooms we saw some examples where pupils were beginning to write at greater length. This was evident in the work we saw pupils doing, as well as work in their books and on display. Some of your pupils do not always make the most of the feedback that they receive from teachers. This means they are not always making the progress that they could in their writing. In some classes pupils continued to be more engaged in what they were doing than in others. We saw a lesson in year 4, for example, where the pupils were very enthusiastic about what they were learning. The teacher used 'freeze-frame role play', where pupils took on the role of different characters from the book being studied. The teacher used opportunities effectively to help pupils develop language. There were other lessons, however, where pupils were much less involved in their learning.

The teaching of phonics has improved and is reflected in the marked improvement seen in the year 1 phonics (the link between letters and their sounds) screening test. There is still more work to be done on the teaching of handwriting. Pupils' work is still not as well presented as it could be and this is also hampering pupils' ability to write at length. As we agreed, the teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is

not improving as quickly as in other areas. The activities we saw were not always inviting enough to children and not as effective for language development as they could be. Developing consistency in the quality of teaching across the school remains the challenge for leaders moving forwards.

As a result of the work you have done to improve teaching, the achievement of pupils is beginning to show signs of improvement. For example, standards in writing have risen, reflected in the better attainment at the end of Key Stage 2. The number of pupils reaching the expected level in Year 1 phonics has increased significantly. Attainment at the end of Year 2 has also improved from the previous year, and the number of pupils leaving Reception at the expected level has gone up. Despite these improvements, there is more to do. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 remains too low and too few pupils are achieving the higher levels across the school.

You are right to be pleased with how you are improving the behaviour of pupils. During our short visits to classrooms pupils behaved well. There were no issues with disruptive behaviour seen. The behaviour policy you have implemented has helped with this, as has the work already done on your 'creative' curriculum. It was good to hear about the educational visits that you now offer. We saw some inconsistencies in the engagement of pupils in some classes. This shows there is still more work to be done to the curriculum so that it meets the interests of all learners. Attendance has started to improve because of the initiatives you have introduced to celebrate attendance. You have also introduced robust systems for challenging families where attendance is not as high as you would like.

Through the links you have with your other school, and with schools under the same Trust, you and your leadership team have been able to use a number of innovative approaches to improve teaching. For example, the use of outstanding teachers to support weaker staff at the academy is beginning to have an impact. You are also developing leadership skills by enabling staff from the academy to work in these partner schools. This will be an important strategy to maintain in moving the school forwards. There is still much work to be done on middle leadership, particularly in mathematics, where the impact on pupils' achievement needs to rise.

Your governors continue to provide regular support and challenge to the school. They monitor the work of the school effectively and provide constructive feedback for you and senior leaders to consider. They are well aware of how well the school is doing and what needs to be done to improve further. They have not rested on their laurels and continue to seek ways of improving their effectiveness. For example, since the last inspection they have looked to recruit people to their number who can bring the skills needed to keep the school moving forwards.

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 Williamson Trust offer effective support. They know the school well and act quickly to provide support from other schools, both within the Trust and further afield, where it has been needed. They have high expectations and aspirations for the school and for the way they work to support it. The brokering of bespoke training for less-experienced staff and to move teachers from 'good' to 'outstanding' demonstrates how they are helping the academy to improve.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Medway and the Academies Advisors Unit at the Department of Education.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes

Seconded Inspector