

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

2 July 2014

Mr Iain Gilmour
Headteacher
Isambard Brunel Junior School
Wymering Road
Portsmouth
PO2 7HX

Dear Mr Gilmour

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Isambard Brunel Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 2 July 2014 with Louise Adams, seconded inspector, 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 your staff 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 March 2014. 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.

The school should take immediate action to:

- carry out an external review of governance so that governors can identify how to challenge school leaders more effectively
- put in place robust whole school systems so that improvement is consistent

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the deputy headteacher, a headteacher from a local school, the chair of governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was

evaluated. With the deputy headteacher I visited classrooms and spoke with pupils. In addition I reviewed a selection of pupils' books.

Context

During the monitoring visit you were absent from the school on sick leave. The school will join the Thinking Schools Trust academy chain on November 1 2014 when an executive headteacher will be appointed for one day a week.

Main findings

Since the inspection you have created a plan for action which addresses the areas that need to improve. Much planning has taken place, and some actions have been started. The plan has been shared with governors and staff; however actions are not clearly enough identified for them to know precisely what they need to do to improve. The action plan does not provide a strategic framework for improving the school. Subject leaders are now all in place, and leadership training has recently begun. However, this is at a very early stage for most. You have begun to devolve more responsibility to other senior leaders after a restructuring of the senior team. Nevertheless, you are still relying too heavily on one capable but inexperienced member of the senior team to take action. Improvements are not coordinated effectively and are therefore not having sufficient impact on standards. Inaccurate self-evaluation and a lack of strategic leadership are barriers to the school becoming good.

Improving teaching and learning has been a key focus for the school. You and the senior team have benefited from recent local authority training. Your judgments about teaching are becoming more rigorous and better informed by marking, feedback and the progress pupils make over time. Good individual support for teachers by the deputy headteacher is leading to some improvements. However, leaders have not yet put in place a whole school system for improving teaching. This means that there is a lack of clarity about what really good teaching, planning and marking look like and how they can be achieved by all staff. Pupils' books show that teachers still have inconsistent and too-low expectations of standards. Marking does not yet give feedback in any consistently helpful way so that pupils can improve their work. This is because there is no robust system to ensure that marking is effective.

Intensive work on improving pupils' writing is already showing some impact, although this improvement is not yet being matched in pupils' reading. This is because there is not yet careful planning about how to maintain standards in all areas. Year 6 appear to be on track to achieve much better results in the SATS tests this summer.

Governors have undertaken some training since the inspection but have not moved quickly or urgently enough to identify exactly what they need to do to support the school's improvement. Governors will rely too heavily on information provided by the school: they plan to visit the school more often but these visits have not yet started.

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

I will return to the school to meet with the full governing body as soon as possible in the autumn term.

External support

The school has been well supported by the link education officer and through useful training for senior leaders. Informal support has been provided by a colleague headteacher. Because of the imminent conversion to academy status, the school has used the local authority's support less keenly than might otherwise have been the case which has limited the impact

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Anwar
Her Majesty's Inspector