

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

9 July 2014

Ms R Swain
Interim Headteacher
Horsmonden Primary School
Back Lane
Horsmonden
Tonbridge
Kent
TN12 8JA

Dear Ms Swain

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Horsmonden Primary School

Following my visit to your school on Wednesday 9 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 March 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:

- improve teaching further by focusing more closely on mathematics so that pupils get more opportunities to apply their skills in a range of contexts
- ensure the work you do on the curriculum means that pupils are given more exciting work to do to develop their writing.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and your deputy headteacher, the new substantive headteacher who starts in September, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. Your deputy headteacher and the new substantive headteacher joined us on short visits to each classroom. During these visits we talked to some pupils and looked through their books. I also evaluated school plans for improvement, the latest headteacher's report to the governing body, governing body minutes and a range of other documents provided by the school.

Context

Since the previous inspection the local authority has carried out a review of governance at the school. As a result the governors have started the process to reconstitute. They have also reorganised how the governing body will now operate. There is an interim headteacher who is leaving at the end of the summer term. The substantive headteacher is due to start in September.

Main findings

You and leaders at all levels are acting swiftly to bring about improvements in the areas identified in the previous inspection report. Despite the clear impact your initial actions have had, you know there is still much to do for the school to become 'good'.

The actions of you and your senior leaders are beginning to improve pupils' achievements. For example the number of pupils now achieving a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage is well above the national average. More pupils are achieving the expected results in the year 1 phonics (the link between letters and their sounds) screening test. There has been a similar pattern of improvement in the phonics test retakes in Year 2. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 has significantly improved. The number of pupils achieving the higher levels in reading, for example, is now much higher than the national average. The progress being made by pupils between the end of Key Stage 1 and the end of Key Stage 2 is improving and now compares more favourably with national averages. You are right that these results only represent what you should expect for the pupils in your school. Despite these improvements, overall there remains a mixed picture of achievement. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1, for example, has declined and is particularly weak in writing. You and your leaders are right to prioritise how you will ensure accelerated progress for these pupils as they move into Year 3.

The improvements you are beginning to see in achievement are because of the initial work to improve teaching. The marking of pupils' work, for example, is now consistently completed in line with the policy you have introduced. We also saw more evidence of teachers checking pupils' understanding during lessons. For

example in an exciting writing lesson seen in Key Stage 2, pupils were learning to write effective adverts about double headed toothbrushes. In this lesson the teacher asked open questions which challenged pupils of different abilities to think about what would work well in their writing. The teacher, through her questioning, skilfully found out which pupils understood and which needed further help to do well. As a result pupils were using more ambitious and effective language in readiness to write.

We also saw many other examples around the school of how pupils are beginning to improve their writing. This was seen both on display in classrooms and around the school, and in books. Where teachers and pupils have made better use of the marking policy you have introduced, pupils are making better progress. This is also because the pupils show more engagement in what they have been asked to write about. Where pupils continue not to do as well in their writing, it is because teachers' expectations are not yet high enough and the tasks pupils are asked to do are not yet engaging and challenging enough for them to write well.

As we agreed, the teaching of mathematics remains a weaker area. This is because teachers are still not giving pupils enough opportunity to apply their skills in a range of real life contexts or by using investigative and reasoning skills. We saw examples where less able pupils were helped to understand how to work out the problems, but higher attaining pupils, who already knew how to use a number of methods, were not stretched enough to build on these. We also saw mathematics lessons in Key Stage 1 that were focused on completing number problems and did not bring mathematics to life as well as they should. This is why the teaching of mathematics needs to be a priority focus for the school moving forwards.

We saw signs that provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is beginning to improve. Children here were joyfully engaged in a range of activities that helped them develop language. We saw several examples of adults taking opportunities to stretch the pupils' use of language further. For example, a group of children, who had started a 'bicycle repair workshop', had moved on to washing and servicing the bus. The adult with them was joining in and engaging in appropriate conversation with the children about the jobs they were doing. This was effectively helping the children to develop their speaking and listening skills. You are right to allocate more money to developing the environment here further.

You and your deputy headteacher are providing strong and effective leadership. You have written clear plans to bring about improvement during your interim period of leadership and for the longer term. These address the recommendations made in the previous inspection, but also wider issues such as the information and communications technology infrastructure. You have increased overall attendance and this is now well above the national average. Through appropriate training you are developing the wider leadership capacity, such as among subject leaders. They are leading meetings with staff to improve teaching in their subjects. The next step

is for your middle managers to make more of an impact on what happens in classrooms. Your skills in reflecting realistically on how well the school is doing ensures staff are beginning to develop a culture for improving the school.

Your governors are showing signs of improvement. Under the strong leadership of the chair, the governors are becoming more effective in their roles. Minutes of governor meetings demonstrate that they are giving more challenge to you and other senior leaders, particularly about how well pupils are doing. They have effective plans for improving their work further and are right to prioritise monitoring the school more closely as a next step.

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 effective and regular support to you and the school. The evidence of this can be seen in the areas where you have already made the most progress. For example, you have made good use of the support of the English consultant to improve teaching in this area. The same can be said about the improvements seen in Reception. Your governors have made good use of the review carried out by the local authority and have acted on their advice. It would be beneficial if you could have further support in the teaching of mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes

Seconded Inspector