

Tribal
Kings Orchard
One Queen Street
Bristol
BS2 0HQ

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0117 311 5359
Email: christina.bannerman@tribalgroup.com

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Irene Smith
Headteacher
Liberty Primary School
Western Road
Mitcham
Surrey
CR4 3EB

Dear Irene Smith

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Liberty Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 1 December 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 July 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and strategic plans are not sharply focused on bringing about rapid improvement.

The school should take immediate action to:

- ensure the strategic plan includes:
 - precise timescales and clear milestones to improve pupils' attainment and progress by June 2015
 - information about how governors will monitor and evaluate the school's progress against priorities for improvement
 - planning a clear role for the National Leader of Education (NLE) in her support for the school's leaders.

The Local Authority should:

- ensure that the action plan sets out precisely how it will support and challenge the school to be good at the next inspection.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, school leaders, pupils, members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The inspector spoke to parents at the start of the day. The school improvement plan and the local authority support plan were evaluated. Brief visits were made to most classes in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. During visits to lessons, the inspector spoke to pupils' about their learning and looked at their work. A range of documentation was scrutinised including records of governing body meetings, pupil performance information and the single central record.

Context

Since the last inspection one assistant headteacher is currently on maternity leave. Two teachers are scheduled to leave in December 2014.

Main findings

Following the full inspection in July, senior leaders renewed their determination to improve the school. They are working productively with staff and governors to develop the quality of teaching further and to ensure more pupils attain higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

Leaders now assess teaching with greater precision and rigour. They know that not enough teaching is consistently good or better as a result of more frequent and focused monitoring activity such as lesson observations, drop-in visits to classrooms and pupils' work scrutiny.

Pupil progress meetings occur more frequently; now half termly. Leaders have established a tracking system to effectively analyse the progress that pupils make and to direct priorities for further improvement. Teachers also have greater clarity about standards across school and in their own class.

Staff are held to account via performance targets if they are to proceed through pay scales which are based on identified pupils who must make rapid progress. Most staff are keen to receive feedback to improve their teaching. Their expectations are now higher and they set pupils harder work. There is more to do however until the school can be judged good at its next inspection. These new developments since

September are well placed to drive up standards but they are too new to yet see a lasting impact on pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching.

Pupils respond positively to marking by teachers to improve their work. Pupils write imaginatively using better structure through the new whole school storytelling project. For example, Year 6 classrooms and corridors were blacked out to re-enact World War 2 air raids. This motivated pupils to draft strong pieces of extended writing.

Presentation in pupils' books has also improved; pupils take greater pride in their work. Handwriting practice is frequent but expectations are too low, some handwriting sheets are far too easy. Pupils' poorly formed letters remain uncorrected on sheets and in their writing.

Despite these modest improvements, too many children in the Early Years Foundation Stage did not exceed a good level of development. In addition, attainment in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 end of year tests declined to below average.

Although behaviour has improved since the start of the academic year as evidenced by short visits to lessons during this monitoring visit, off task behaviour due to less effective teaching persists in a minority of classes. Some parents report that allegations of bullying are not dealt with effectively enough.

The school's strategic plan is not robust enough to direct improvement in the school. It identifies correct priorities but monitoring and evaluation lacks precise timescales. Milestones do not indicate for example when teaching is expected to be consistently good or when pupils' attainment will match national average. The intended monitoring role by governors is cursory. Governors carry out more visits but these are not linked to school priorities. Governors do not specify actions they will take as a result of leaders' self-evaluation information. Governors do take tough decisions however, when considering pay awards for all staff through performance management procedures.

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 action plan provides insufficient detail regarding how precisely its challenge and support will ensure that Liberty School will be good at its next inspection. Officers brokered a National Leader of Education (NLE) to work with the school and local authority consultants' work with teachers to improve pupils' literacy skills, behaviour and the achievement of pupils with English as an additional

language. The support plan however, makes no reference to the intended impact of any of this work on pupils' achievement of teaching by an agreed review date.

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

Yours sincerely

Ann Debono
Her Majesty's Inspector