

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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Mrs Jayne Peacock
Headteacher
Parracombe Church of England Primary School
Parracombe
Barnstaple
EX31 4QJ

Dear Jayne Peacock

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Parracombe Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 27 January 2015, 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 September 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 observations of teaching focus closely on the progress made by different groups of pupils
- encourage governors to set out a programme of monitoring activities that will provide first hand evidence of the effectiveness and impact of the planned actions
- make better use of new resource books to ensure pupils are provided with more opportunities to use their mathematical skills and deepen their understanding.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, subject leaders, three members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. You accompanied me on visits to all classes. During the visits to lessons I took the opportunity to gauge whether the pupils were provided with work that is challenging enough. I also looked with you at pupils' books to evaluate the quality of their writing and mathematics.

Context

Parracombe Church of England Primary, Kentisbury Primary School and Lynton Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School are led by an executive headteacher and one governing body. The subject leaders of Literacy and Numeracy are responsible for developing teaching and learning in English and mathematics across the three schools. All three schools were judged as requiring improvement at their most recent inspections.

Pupils from Kentisbury and Parracombe are taught together in the same classes. Key Stage 2 aged pupils are taught at Parracombe, Key Stage 1 aged pupils and children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught at Kentisbury.

There are currently two vacancies on the governing body. There have been no changes in staffing since the last inspection.

Main findings

You and other senior leaders have developed a single action plan that is an appropriate response to the recent section 5 inspection findings identified for the three schools. The plan is a comprehensive document that clearly describes the actions that will be taken to improve pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching across the three schools. A single action plan is a valid approach because of the common weaknesses that currently exist across the schools, namely:

- the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement, especially in Key Stage 2
- opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills in solving problems
- pupils' spelling, grammar and punctuation
- the effectiveness of subject leaders in improving the quality of teaching and pupils' learning.

The actions taken since September have begun to improve weaknesses in subject leadership. Subject leaders are now regularly observing teaching and looking at pupils' work, contributing to the school's drive for improvement. For example, leaders of Literacy and Numeracy are more actively involved in monitoring the

school's performance. As a result, you and senior leaders are more systematically providing staff with appropriate training and support programmes. Through a developing partnership with local schools, staff have observed high quality teaching and are in the process of introducing these methods into their practice. However, senior leaders' observations of teaching do not pay sufficient attention to the progress made by different groups of pupils. Consequently, feedback is too general and is less effective because it does not provide staff with clear information about the pupils that are not making the progress they should.

Subject leaders are developing a clearer grasp of pupils' achievement and making effective use of this information to drive improvement. Through their increased monitoring they hold a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their subjects. English, mathematics and science leaders have produced plans that set out the actions and initiatives to develop pupils' achievement over the year. Although they compile reports for governors outlining the progress made each term, the reports are too variable in quality. Governors are better placed to monitor the school's progress when reports comment on the effectiveness of new initiatives rather than where they merely describe the completion of actions. For instance, the English leader's report provided valuable information on the effectiveness of actions taken to improve pupils' achievement in spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Teachers are responding to training and trialling new strategies that are helping to raise the quality of teaching. For example, pupils' books confirm that they are regularly responding to teachers' comments to improve the quality of their work. Pupils are more frequently producing longer pieces of writing and are developing their writing skills over a planned sequence of lessons. However, these initiatives are still relatively new and are not yet fully in place in all classes.

It is clear from our scrutiny of books that pupils are not regularly challenged to develop their mathematical skills and deepen their understanding. For example, in some classes pupils learning a new method of calculation did not deepen their understanding by applying the method to solve problems and develop their fluency. A new maths scheme designed to increase opportunities for pupils to solve problems and apply their skills is not being used effectively across all classes. Teachers are sometimes slow to spot pupils' mathematical misconceptions or to use the new mathematical resources to set pupils challenging problem solving activities. In addition, we noticed that pupils are not confident in their knowledge of place value of numbers and this hampers their fluency.

During our visits to the Reception class we found that staff's assessments and planning require improvement. Children's learning diaries contain some entries but are not providing an up-to-date record of children's progress across the Early Years curriculum. It is not clear how children's next steps are used to adapt planning and ensure children learn and develop across all areas of learning.

Governors have shown their commitment to the school and are supportive in their approach. They are keen to develop their roles and responsibilities but display a thoughtful consideration that this process should not be detrimental to building professional relationships with staff. Minutes of governing body meetings indicate that by more frequently asking searching questions, governors are providing appropriate levels of challenge. The school's progress is monitored closely by a small group of governors who meet regularly with you. They check and record that planned actions have been completed on time but this provides an overly positive view of progress. This is because their evaluations are not yet sufficiently focused on the difference the actions have made to pupils' achievement. As yet governors have not set out a programme of monitoring activities that will provide first hand evidence of the effectiveness and impact of planned actions.

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 is providing appropriate support to the school. A timely monitoring visit completed by local authority representatives gave an accurate account of the quality of teaching and learning across the schools. The information gathered was used appropriately by the local authority to commission and draw on the support of a local teaching school partnership.

Local schools have begun to provide a programme of support that is beginning to develop the quality of teaching. However, progress is hindered because it is not clear how support builds sequentially on previous coaching to ensure teachers improve their performance and progress towards key objectives.

An additional local authority monitoring visit to the school's Reception class identified areas of weakness in the school's Early Years provision. As yet no action has yet been taken to address these issues.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Devon and the Diocese of Exeter.

Yours sincerely

Mark Lindfield
Her Majesty's Inspector