

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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

**Direct T** 0117 311 5323  
**Email:** [suzy.smith@tribalgroup.com](mailto:suzy.smith@tribalgroup.com)



13 March 2015

Miss M Terry  
Headteacher  
Sutton Valence Primary School  
North Street  
Sutton Valence  
Maidstone  
Kent, ME17 3HT

Dear Miss Terry

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sutton Valence Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 12 March 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2013. 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 section 5 inspection in September 2013. The school should take further action to:

- put in place a robust school action plan which builds on previous work to tackle all identified areas for improvement, with clear milestones to help leaders and governors check the school's progress
- ensure local authority support is linked strategically to the school's plan so that everyone prioritises the same areas.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, the special educational needs coordinator and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. Brief visits

were made to all classes and the inspector looked at pupils' books as well as talking to a group of pupils. Documentation relating to checks on the school's work by senior leaders and the local authority was reviewed. Checks made on staff about their suitability to work with children were also reviewed.

## **Context**

Following the first monitoring inspection in December 2013, a new substantive headteacher was appointed, and started in April 2014. The deputy headteacher left in December 2014 and will be replaced in April 2015. The chair and vice-chair of governors stepped down in December 2014, and have been replaced. There are temporary teachers in the Year 1, Year 5 and Year 6 classes. There are currently no subject leaders for English or mathematics. A new special educational needs coordinator started in January 2015.

## **Main findings**

The headteacher is determined to make the necessary improvements so that the school is judged to be 'good'. However, it has been difficult to recruit good quality permanent replacements for teachers who have left the school, including subject leaders. This has reduced capacity within the leadership team and held back the pace of change. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed from April 2015 to strengthen leadership.

The original school development plan was not updated as staff responsible for key actions left the school. As a result, school leaders and governors do not have a strategic approach to improvement. The headteacher works extremely hard but sometimes puts energy into less fundamental issues such as school meals provision, instead of concentrating on teaching and learning. The headteacher recognises the need for a targeted plan to systematically embed the improvements already underway, and tackle areas which still need to be addressed.

The new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is putting more robust systems in place for pupils who require additional support. Class teachers are rightly given more responsibility for the recently-revised plans to help these pupils catch up. The SENCo knows there is more to be done to ensure such plans contain measurable targets so that the effectiveness of this work may be checked. The more regular meetings with teaching assistants allow any problems to be resolved more quickly and ensure all staff are updated with important information.

The quality of teaching varies across the school. Most recent progress data indicate that the school is unlikely to meet the government floor standards (the minimum standards expected for reading, writing and mathematics) in 2015. The school was also below floor standards in 2014. In some classes, pupils can explain exactly what

they are learning, but this is not always the case. Where there are temporary teachers, pupils report that tasks lack challenge. They often repeat the same work so they do not make enough progress. Some teachers implement the new marking policy effectively: in these classes pupils can see what they have done well and how to improve their work. The headteacher acknowledges this good practice needs to be consistent across the school to help raise standards.

The learning environment has improved and pupils appreciate that the school is cleaner and less cluttered. The welcoming displays at the entrance to each classroom indicate what pupils are learning and help to excite them about their work. A central whole school display unites pupils because it celebrates everyone's strengths. The outside area for the Reception class is used more creatively to engage pupils in their learning. For example, as part of their topic on castles, children enjoy creating a dungeon to imprison their dragon! There is a drive to promote writing through initiatives such as 'writer of the week', although the impact of this has not been measured.

Although there is a new chair and vice-chair of governors, there are six governor vacancies which means the governing body overall lacks capacity. The chair of governors is sensibly seeking to recruit governors with the right skills to provide school leaders with effective support and challenge. Governors have rightly planned visits and are gaining a broad overview of the school's work. However they are held back by the lack of an effective school development plan. Governors do not know precisely what leaders are aiming to achieve and are thus unable to check effectively on progress. The chair of governors understands the importance of a more strategic plan for both the school and the governing body.

Low standards and the lack of capacity for improvement is a concern and the school is unlikely to be judged good at its next section 5 inspection. As I was unable to meet with the full governing body I will return to the school as soon as possible to do so.

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**

Advisers from the local authority make more regular visits and offer some useful individual support to teachers and school leaders. For example, work to review standards in writing helped to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments. More recently there has been additional support from specialist leaders of education and a local leader of education. However, each adviser sets their own agenda and there is no strategic plan to ensure that all this work is carefully prioritised to meet the school's needs. School leaders do not have enough capacity to fully implement all

the recommendations from each different adviser. As a result some of this support is ineffective.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**