

Tribal Group
1-4 Portland
Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR
T 0845 123 6001
F 0845 123 6002

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs Mary Hiscock
The Headteacher
St Barnabas Church of England School, Market Lavington
Drove Lane
Market Lavington
Devizes
Wiltshire
SN10 4NT

Dear Mrs Hiscock

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 30 November 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection on 30 November 2006, the school was asked to:

- make better use of assessment information to plan lessons that always challenge pupils and extend their achievement, particularly the most able
- ensure that marking helps pupils understand what to do next to improve their work
- ensure teaching and learning are monitored rigorously by all school leaders in order to ensure consistency of practice across the school
- compile a central list of information in order to meet government requirements in relation to safeguarding pupils.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making inadequate progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

The school has not created a coherent action plan to rectify weaknesses in the use of assessment information and has given the issue insufficient attention. Teachers' planning has not been analysed with adequate rigour and teachers have not been given enough guidance about how to improve. As a result, there is too much variation in the quality of teachers' planning, as at the time of the last inspection. In

Year 6, pupils' needs are precisely assessed and work is then pitched at just the right level to enable pupils to achieve well. However, whilst there is some well informed planning for pupils of different capabilities in Years 4 and 5, good practice is not sufficiently widespread. Teachers' expectations of pupils' potential achievement are not always high enough and the most capable pupils sometimes mark time because their work is too easy. In addition, teachers are not always sufficiently precise about what they expect pupils to learn from the tasks that are set. These weaknesses are inhibiting pupils' achievement, as they were when the school was last inspected.

The school has not prioritised marking as an issue for attention. Consequently, the quality of teachers' marking is variable, as it was at the time of the last inspection. In Years 4, 5 and 6, there are examples of good marking, which provide pupils with clear guidance about their next steps in learning. In Year 6, pupils are successfully taught to evaluate their own work, and this contributes to their good progress. However, some teachers still miss opportunities to show pupils how to improve their work, marking rarely refers to pupils' learning targets in English and mathematics, and mediocre work is sometimes unjustifiably praised.

Too little monitoring and evaluation has taken place since the last inspection, and variations in the quality of teaching and learning remain. Pupils' progress declined in the last academic year. Only in Reception and Year 6 did pupils achieve well, and the progress of pupils in other classes was sometimes too slow. Staff illness, and the need to employ temporary teachers, contributed to this decline. A significant number of pupils left the school between January and the end of the summer term 2007, reflecting parental concerns. However, despite this difficult situation, monitoring and evaluation procedures lacked rigour and lesson observations were very rare.

In the current educational year, there has been no significant staff illness, and the teaching enables pupils to make satisfactory progress in their learning. Consequently, the school roll is no longer falling. However, there are still inconsistencies in the teaching, and weaknesses are not being tackled with enough tenacity. The headteacher, who took up her post in September 2007, has good analytical skills and a realistic view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. She has evaluated assessment data very thoroughly and ensured that all teachers are aware of the progress that pupils should be making. Strategies to provide support for those who have slipped behind have been introduced and are beginning to bear fruit. The headteacher has observed teaching in all classes, and made clear and pertinent comments about its quality. However, she has not followed up these observations to address areas for improvement.

At present, too much responsibility for monitoring and developing the school's work rests on the shoulders of the headteacher. The role of the senior management team and subject leaders is largely underdeveloped. Little focused monitoring and evaluation has been undertaken by these staff since the last inspection, and their impact on the quality of teaching and learning remains limited.

A central list has been created and statutory requirements for safeguarding pupils are now fully met.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

David Westall
Additional Inspector