

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



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Mrs D Harding  
The Acting Headteacher  
Pennycross Primary School  
Arden Grove  
Pennycross  
Plymouth  
Devon  
PL2 3RL

Dear Mrs Harding

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff, pupils and governors gave when I inspected your school on 13 January 2009, for the time you gave to our phone discussions, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

Following a secondment to another school, the headteacher at the time of the previous inspection has resigned and the governing body has initiated the process to appoint a new headteacher. The deputy headteacher has been acting headteacher since April 2008, with recent confirmation that this has been extended to September 2009. An acting deputy headteacher has been appointed from within the school staff. The Key Stage 2 coordinator who was also the literacy coordinator, a member of the senior management team and the teacher of Year 6, left in August 2008. The teaching post has been covered through a temporary appointment and the responsibilities for literacy shared between two teachers. However, the responsibilities specifically relating to the senior management team have not been re-allocated. A new chair of the governing body took up post in November 2008.

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 10 and 11 December 2007, the school was asked to:

- improve standards in reading, writing and mathematics throughout the school
- improve all teaching to the level of the best and iron out inconsistencies in relation to challenging the more able pupils and making sure all pupils know what they need to do to improve
- improve provision for the outdoor curriculum in the Foundation Stage.

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

Provisional results for the 2008 national tests show a significant improvement in the standards attained by pupils in Year 6. The proportion of pupils meeting expectations is above the national average in English and mathematics. In English the proportion of pupils attaining the higher levels is in line with the national average, whilst in mathematics, although the proportion has improved, it remains below the national average. Against national trends, standards in writing are higher than reading and the girls attained higher results in mathematics than the boys. The standards attained by pupils in science are well above the national average, particularly in the higher levels, demonstrating excellent pupil progress. High quality teaching in Year 6 and very effective interventions accelerated pupils' learning across subjects. The progress of different groups of pupils, including those who are vulnerable, is similar to that of their peers. The school's data indicates that sustaining the standards attained in 2008, where pupils' attainment on entry was higher than usual, will prove to be very challenging and standards are likely to be lower in the coming year. Standards on entry to the school are generally exceptionally low and there is a high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a high level of pupil mobility. The school knows that it needs to secure consistently good teaching across Years 3 to 6 to secure good rates of progress for pupils currently in the school. Targets are appropriately challenging.

Whilst provisional 2008 results for pupils in Year 2 indicate improvements in reading standards which exceeded the school's targets, overall standards in English and mathematics remain stubbornly well below the national average, reflecting satisfactory pupil progress. The school is rightly continuing to focus on improving standards in writing, particularly for boys, and extending the level of challenge to pupils to improve the proportion attaining the higher levels. Securing more frequent and regular opportunities for developing and practising writing skills are a priority for the school. The improvements in standards in reading reflect the effectiveness of intervention strategies.

The school's data shows that children enter and leave the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) with skills well below those expected for their age, with boys' skills being particularly weak. The school has rightly identified improving provision in the EYFS as a top priority to secure the necessary rapid progress needed to provide pupils with a good start to Year 1. The school, with local authority support, is to begin work on this in the near future and an additional teacher has been deployed to work in the EYFS. Work with the local authority will include securing improvements to the outdoor curriculum. A canopy to provide all-weather protection to the outdoor area has very recently been installed. Constraints to the use of this area remain, including issues relating to the pronounced gradient.

Although the quality of teaching is not yet consistently good, improvements have been secured. In particular, increasingly effective use is made of the regular tracking

of pupils' progress to inform teaching strategies, including the targeting of appropriate interventions to support pupils requiring additional help. Good teaching in the school is characterised by close matching of learning activities to pupils' needs, a variety of activities which captures pupils' interest and actively involves them in their learning, and effective deployment of skilled teaching assistants. This quality of teaching secures good progress in pupils' learning. Pupils enjoy their lessons and this was evident in a Year 2 science session investigating the effect of heat on different materials. The school's strong emphasis on investigation in science has contributed to the recent excellent achievement of pupils in the subject. Where teaching is less successful, learning activities are not yet sufficiently targeted to pupils' needs, especially those who are more able. Through the consistent use of short term targets, written in accessible language, pupils are confident about the next step to take to improve their learning. Longer term individual pupil targets to motivate and raise aspirations are not yet employed. There is evidence of some good marking. For example, in Year 2 and Year 6 there is a clear reference to pupils' curriculum targets and what to do next to improve. This quality of marking, however, is not yet securely embedded across the school.

The acting headteacher, supported well by the acting deputy headteacher, is leading the school with determination and commitment through an unsettling period of staff changes. She has secured a positive and inclusive ethos with honest and open reflection on the school's strengths and areas for improvement. She welcomes professional dialogue and is very receptive to new initiatives which will improve the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils. The LA has provided good support to the school although in recent months this has been mainly focused on supporting the governing body with the headteacher appointment process. It is set to increase to support developments in EYFS.

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

Yours sincerely

Valerie Pearson  
Her Majesty's Inspector