

Tribal Education
1-4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

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

Direct T 0845 123 6001
Direct F 0845 123 6002
email:sarah.cartlidge@tribalgroup.com

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Mrs Rebecca Mottershead
Church Hill School
Burlington Rise
East Barnet
London
EN4 8NN

Dear Mrs Mottershead

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 15 September 2010, for the time you gave to our telephone discussion, the preparatory meeting and for the information you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to your staff, the pupils who made time to meet with me during the day, the School Improvement Partner and the Chair of Governors.

Since the last inspection the school has faced turbulence in staffing. Three new teachers joined the school last year, two teachers left and several maternity covers placed additional demands on the headteacher and deputy headteacher. The restructuring of the senior leadership team to include three new appointments with effect from September 2010 and the appointment of a new teacher in Year 6 has now stabilised the staffing.

As a result of the inspection on 9–10 July 2009, the school was asked to:

- accelerate pupils' progress, especially that of the most able pupils, by providing more good teaching and learning and ensuring that assessment information is used well to guide pupils in how to improve their learning
- ensure pupils' behaviour is consistently good
- establish clear roles for all leaders so that they can consistently promote high standards of teaching, learning and achievement.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

More systematic use of data information is steadily improving attainment across all core subjects at Key Stage 2. A fall in standards in English in 2008 was reversed in 2009 to be in line with standards found nationally. Standards in mathematics and

science rose to just above the national average in 2009. The proportion of pupils achieving higher levels in English and mathematics was below that found nationally in 2009. Teacher assessments from 2010 for Key Stage 2 show a much higher proportion of pupils attaining Level 5 or above in English and mathematics, reflecting the school's success in stretching the more able pupils to achieve higher standards. The progress of the more able pupils has accelerated. As a result of increased personalised support, tighter tracking and better teaching, an increasing number of pupils are starting to make good progress. The school is successfully tackling a few pockets of underachievement, notably by boys. At both Key Stage 1 and 2, leaders can pinpoint pupils who are making less progress than expected and are holding staff to account in rigorous pupil progress meetings.

Lesson observations confirm leaders' judgement that teaching is satisfactory overall but is increasingly good. Teachers are more adept at using assessment information to plan lessons that meet the needs of most pupils. The more able pupils receive greater challenge in lessons, accelerating their progress within lessons and over time. Good teaching uses questioning to help pupils develop thinking skills, challenging them to explain ideas and justify how they solve problems. In some lessons group work effectively supports pupils who need to work at a slower pace than others, giving teachers the chance to move around classrooms and work with different pupils. When teaching is only satisfactory pupils make slower progress, either because work is still not challenging enough or they need clearer guidance in how to improve their work.

Lessons increasingly provide opportunity for independent learning. Year 5 pupils confidently describe how they choose particular levels of numeracy tasks and can rationalise why the level chosen fits their targets. Leaders have established a model of different levels of tasks through a back-to-basics option, a consolidating option and challenge or challenge plus option. This is starting to be embedded across the school. A new marking policy is being used more consistently but some pupils need help to make connections between comments in their books, work in lessons and their targets.

An audit of pupils' views about behaviour helped leaders review how to address concerns raised at the last inspection. Governors held two parent consultation evenings giving good opportunity for parents to hear pupils' views and discuss the school's behaviour policy in the light of its review. Positive action by leaders is reflected in good behaviour seen around the school and in lessons. Pupils understand why the golden rules are important to a safe and happy school and are confident that minor disruptions in lessons are quickly dealt with. During inspection behaviour was good and conducive to learning.

Support from the local authority has been well received by the school, with a positive reciprocal relationship helping the school move forward purposefully since the last inspection. The work with gifted and talented advisors and advanced skills

teachers has refreshed ideas for the curriculum and teaching. Staff comment favourably about a renewed energy resulting from a more comprehensive vision and a more cohesive leadership structure.

The judicious decision to restructure the senior leadership team has established clearer roles and responsibilities through new job descriptions. This new structure is unequivocally a catalyst for further improvement. While the work of new senior leaders has yet to have significant impact in raising achievement in every year group, improvements in teaching through regular monitoring, and better progress of individual pupils at the end of last term are indicators of early successes. Senior leaders acknowledge that the development plan needs a more penetrating and incisive focus on performance targets, underpinned by outcomes for all groups of pupils.

Governors are increasingly confident in asking questions about assessment data in judging how well the school is tackling any pockets of static or slow-moving pupil progress. Leaders are not complacent and possess a realistic determination to eradicate any remaining inconsistencies in the quality of learning and progress within the school.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joanna Beckford-Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector