

Tribal
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 0117 3115319
Direct F 0117 3150430
Direct email: matthew.parker@tribalgroup.com



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Mr R Worsfold
Headteacher
Air Balloon Hill Primary School
Hillside Road
St George
Bristol
BS5 7PB

Dear Mr Worsfold

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Air Balloon Hill Primary School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 17 January 2012 and for the information which you provided during the inspection.

As a result of the inspection on 8–9 December 2010, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement, which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Although standards in English were low in the 2011 tests, there is clear evidence from pupils' books that achievement in writing is improving. Current Year 6 pupils are working at levels expected for their age group and are gaining increasing confidence in writing for a range of different purposes. The creative approach to the curriculum provides good opportunities for the pupils to develop a broader approach to their skills development. For example, during topic sessions, they change imaginatively the endings of well-known stories such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and this helps them to consolidate their learning. Pupils make better use of well-constructed sentences where words have been skilfully chosen to captivate the reader's interest. Their ability to punctuate accurately is developing satisfactorily and older pupils demonstrate a suitable use of paragraphing to organise the content of

their writing. The gap between the achievements of different groups of pupils is improving because they are supported well during specific sessions.

Standards in mathematics were also low in the 2011 tests. However, by raising teacher expectations, personalising pupil targets and providing additional tuition to develop mathematical skills, pupil achievement is improving. Current Year 6 pupils are working within levels expected for their age group.

Following changes to the middle leadership structure and within the teaching staff, pupil progress has accelerated. There is a relentless focus on pupils receiving quality feedback to improve achievement and this is monitored closely by middle and senior leaders. However, they are fully aware that this is not completely consistent throughout the school.

The quality of teaching

Examples of good and outstanding teaching remain positive features of the school and these are accurately reflected in the monitoring and evaluation undertaken by senior leaders. These lessons are characterised by clear exposition by the teacher, focused learning intentions, a rigorous pace and well-measured use of humour. This was exemplified in a Year 6 literacy lesson where pupils were working on creating similes and metaphors. The sheer enthusiasm and exciting introduction of the teacher enabled the pupils to create interesting phrases, such as 'teeth as sharp as witches' talons' and 'a stare as evil as the devil's heart'. Good opportunities were given to enable the pupils to reflect and assess the similes and metaphors planned by their classmates. Other effective sessions include opportunities for the pupils to share ideas with their peers. These include effective use of 'talk partners' where they discuss ideas and suggestions with a classmate and assess each other's work. This promotes social development well. Good-quality teaching was observed when pupils were given time to work independently either individually or in groups. For example, in a Year 4 topic lesson, pupils were observed working with purpose as they planned and constructed their own setting for a story-ending. They enthusiastically selected their own materials and solved ways to join together the various materials they were using. Meanwhile, their teacher carefully observed them and skilfully asked questions to extend and challenge their thinking.

By using stories as a basis for creative topic work the school promotes a strong reading culture, which has a positive impact on the pupils' spiritual and cultural development. This is supported well through an emphasis on story-writing and developing their knowledge of letter sounds. Nevertheless, occasionally there is an over-use of story-maps. Letter sounds are not always accurately taught and planned activities do not always fully meet the needs of all abilities. Good use is made of specialist teaching support for those pupils who find reading difficult or who may be using English as an additional language. Adult volunteer reading partners play an important part in supporting reading skills.

Teachers speak enthusiastically about the school's new creative approach to the curriculum and enjoy working across the different subject areas to provide meaning and relevance to the pupils. The introduction of core learning skills throughout the school has widened the dimension of the curriculum and prepares the pupils well for life skills. Nevertheless, there are still a significant minority of lessons where pupils are not sufficiently involved in their learning because they sit inactively for too long while their teachers talk. Senior leaders and managers are fully aware of where improvements in teaching are needed and are providing suitable support and training tailored to meet individual requirements.

The introduction of a whole-school feedback and marking policy is raising teacher expectations and providing clear direction for the pupils' learning. Pupils talk with pride about the way successful work is marked with a pink pen and understand that this means their teacher is 'tickled pink' with their efforts. Pupils know that comments written in the green pen helpfully guide them in the direction they need to 'grow' in their learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive and, even in lessons that are less than engaging, behaviour is good. Despite the vastness of the school site and the fact that this is a very large primary school, all pupils move around sensibly and with due concern for their peers. They are keen to attend school and careful monitoring by senior management ensures pupils attend punctually.

The quality of leadership and management of the school

By embedding the distinctive roles of the two deputy headteachers and establishing a focused middle management team, the school has strengthened its ability to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning throughout the school. Middle leaders ensure that their teaching teams use available data to support individual pupils and challenge the more able. By evaluating pupil outcomes regularly, specific intervention groups have accelerated progress. This has enabled senior leaders to set new and ambitious targets. The governing body continue to support the school well and are developing a greater understanding of their need to provide challenge in a more detailed and focused way. The school makes appropriate use of the regular visits from the local authority to validate its own self-evaluation.

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

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2010

Raise standards in writing across the school by ensuring that pupils:

- edit and improve their work based upon teachers' thorough marking
- write for a stimulating range of purposes across the curriculum, including writing about what they have read or are working on in lessons
- develop their construction of sentences and paragraphs.

Improve the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school so that it is at least good or better by ensuring that all staff know how to:

- use data from assessment to plan the next steps of pupils' learning
- plan opportunities for pupils to use their skills of independence
- mark pupils' work with pointers for improvement
- challenge more-able pupils by providing them with extension activities.