

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 311 5359
Direct F 0117 315 0430
Email: christina.bannerman@tribalgroup.com

12 July 2013

Mrs Gill Denham
Executive Principal
Willow Primary School
Wexham Road
Slough
SL2 5FF

Dear Mrs Denham

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Willow Primary School

Following my visit with Mary Massey, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 10 and 11 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the academy's predecessor school was judged to be a school causing concern.

Evidence

The inspectors visited 15 lessons, of which six were observed jointly with the executive headteacher or associate headteacher. They scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, senior leaders, members of staff, groups of pupils and the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors also looked at pupils' work books and teachers' planning in lessons and spoke with parents and carers at the end of the school day.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy is making reasonable progress in raising achievement for all pupils.

Context

The school converted to academy status on 1 February 2013 and is now a member of the Marish Academy Trust. A single governing body serves both academies in this Trust. The executive headteacher, seconded from the Marish Academy Trust,

continues to lead the school. All staff transferred from the predecessor school to the academy. In February 2013, an experienced assistant headteacher joined the school. An associate headteacher was then appointed in April 2013, in preparation for taking on the operational running of the academy from September 2013. Two new staff members have also been appointed to teach in Year 1 and Year 2. The number on roll is expected to increase in the coming months. The academy currently has no Year 6 and the oldest pupils are currently in Year 5.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

The quality of pupils' learning in lessons has rapidly improved and is now much more consistent between classes and year groups. Since the academy opened, a higher proportion of pupils have achieved the challenging targets set for them. The school accurately recognise that pupils in Key Stage 2 have not made sufficient progress in the past and consequently, their attainment at the end of Year 5 is too low. However, because these pupils are now being taught well, they are rapidly making up lost ground and making faster progress.

Children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and experiences at below the levels expected for their age. Staff absence in the nursery has slowed the rate at which children learn. However, as a result of creative and exciting teaching in the Reception class, children make good progress. They particularly benefit from an exciting and well-planned outdoor learning environment which, along with secure teaching of basic language and number skills, ensures they are well prepared for Year 1.

Standards in Key Stage 1 have risen and pupils make good progress from their starting points. This means that standards in reading and writing are now in line with national expectations and above in mathematics. The results of checks in Year 1 to assess how well pupils read are much improved from those of the previous year and are now above the national average. Inspectors heard pupils read with fluency and expression. Better reading is having a positive impact on accelerating pupils' rates of progress in all lessons.

The academy's leaders act decisively to support those at risk of falling behind and go the extra mile on a daily basis to involve parents and carers in supporting their own child's learning. As a result, the academy is successful in closing the gap in achievement between pupils who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium and those who are not. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs also achieve as well as other pupils in the school. There are no significant differences between the progress made by pupils from different ethnic backgrounds.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving and as a result, pupils make faster progress. Teachers' commitment to developing their own practice is impressive and they have benefited from high-quality coaching and support provided by school leaders across the academy Trust and from external consultants. The negative impact of staff absence is now reducing as leaders are taking opportunities to recruit permanent teachers as vacancies arise.

Inspectors observed good teaching and a small proportion of outstanding practice during the inspection. In these lessons, work was well planned to meet the needs of all abilities. Pupils were excited and keen to learn and persevered with the tasks set. In less successful lessons, teachers do not always use assessments well enough to plan work which challenges the most-able pupils. The explanations that teachers give are clear, but sometimes pupils' learning slows when these are overly long and pupils sit passively on the carpet. Also on occasions, the work is too hard, which is sometimes the case for pupils who have recently arrived at the school with little or no written or spoken English.

Classrooms have become vibrant and exciting places to learn. Displays to support learning are of a very high quality and pupils know their work is celebrated and valued. As a result, they strive to present their work to the highest standard and take pride in their achievements. Teachers mark work frequently and carefully, setting out clearly what pupils have done well and what they need to do to improve. Observations and work in pupils' books show that pupils now regularly use their literacy and numeracy skills across a range of subjects. This is having a positive impact on raising standards for all groups of pupils in these subjects.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils behave well in lessons and at break times. Pupils' attitudes to learning are extremely positive. 'I love school. I love learning and we learn lots of new work' are typical of comments made to inspectors. As a result, pupils are keen to come to school and attendance has significantly improved to broadly average. The academy has adopted creative solutions to improve attendance and punctuality. For example, the academy provides minibuses to pick up pupils living some distance from the school. Also an increasing number of parents and carers use the breakfast club to ensure their children are in school at the start of the day. Parents and carers spoke in glowing terms to inspectors about the work of the academy and the improvements made this year.

Pupils are clear they feel very safe in the academy and talk enthusiastically about the continuing improvements to the academy. They are polite and courteous to each other and to adults and relationships across the school are excellent. Pupils in Year 5 have been trained to be junior leaders and support younger ones very well, particularly at break times.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The executive headteacher provides very strong and effective leadership for this academy. She is ably supported by the other senior leaders including those from within the Trust and a drive and momentum for rapid and continuing improvement have been established. As a result, staff feel valued and are determined to work together to share good practice and increasingly deliver the best lessons to their pupils. Morale is high and all staff share in the vision for the school's effectiveness to become outstanding.

The academy's improvement plan is ambitious and areas for improvement are carefully prioritised. Actions taken are rigorously monitored to check the difference they make. Senior leaders know the academy's strengths and weaknesses very well. All staff are trained to be leaders in this academy and this is making a very positive contribution to improving this school.

Subject leaders, including those who are newly appointed, are receiving high-quality support which is helping them develop their subjects and monitor the impact of the actions they take. For example, they scrutinise pupils' work regularly and meet with colleagues to review the progress that pupils have made. Swift action is then taken to support pupils at risk of falling behind.

The new governing body is well led and has an accurate understanding of the academy's strengths and its main areas for improvement. The detailed information they receive from the executive headteacher is used well to enable them to challenge academy leaders and check the work of the academy for themselves.

External support

The two academies in the Marish Academy Trust have worked together very effectively to provide the support required to strengthen the leadership and teaching at Willow Primary School. Further high-quality support has been provided by two external consultants brought in by the academy. This support has had a significant impact in improving provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and improving the quality of teaching across the school.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body, the local authority of Slough, and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Leahy
Her Majesty's Inspector
(Seconded Inspector)