

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

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Judith Pemberton and Sheena Hamilton
Headteachers
Mayplace Primary School
Woodside Road
Barnehurst
Bexley
DA7 6EQ

Dear Mrs Pemberton and Mrs Hamilton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Mayplace Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 31 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- make sure that all the success criteria in the action plan are quantifiable and link directly to the progress and attainment targets for all pupil groups.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, senior and middle leaders, a governor and the Vice Chair and Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and a Local Leader of Education who is working with you. Your school improvement plan was evaluated and I reviewed documents relating to the monitoring of teaching. I reviewed pupils' work during our visits to lessons and examined the findings from the external review of governance.

Context

Since the recent inspection, one teacher has left and two teachers are about to begin maternity leave. There are three vacancies on the governing body.

Main findings

Working with your senior and middle leaders, your governors and the local authority, you have worked with clear purpose and vision to start to address the areas requiring improvement from your recent inspection. There is good unity in the team and strong sense of urgency that permeates the work to improve the school.

The statement of action, your improvement plan, is fit for purpose. The plan includes clear responsibilities, addresses the key priorities and mostly includes measurable success criteria. We discussed the importance of sharpening the focus on the progress of different pupil groups so that all leaders and governors are continually checking how quickly gaps in pupils' achievement are closing.

Changes to the way you monitor and evaluate teaching in lessons and impact of teaching over time by scrutinising pupils' work, is giving you a more comprehensive picture of teachers' work. Expecting teachers to analyse and present information about their pupils' progress is making them more accountable. The same is not yet true of all teaching assistants; a next-step as part of your monitoring and evaluation cycle.

You and your middle leaders are observing lessons and jointly moderating the quality of pupils' work to check your judgements. Your middle leaders are a well-focused team and eager to learn. They are rising to the additional responsibilities and demands on them to hold all teachers to account for their practice. They are developing their leadership skills in planning improvements and as a whole team have a good understanding of the current strengths and issues the school faces. However, despite better systems for monitoring teaching some lesson observation evaluations are generous in grades and comments. They do not, for instance, give a precise explanation about the quality of pupils' subject knowledge. A few are generous in judging pupils' behaviour and attitude as 'outstanding' despite comments which indicate that pupils could do better.

Marking is regular and the quality is steadily improving. Most pupils respond to feedback and in some instances the feedback develops pupils' understanding beyond their work in lessons. This is not consistent throughout the school or across all subjects. Insufficient challenge in the feedback hinders how well pupils can apply their mathematical knowledge and reasoning, develop their ideas in writing and apply knowledge and skills across subjects.

You have made judicious decisions to change the timing of sessions in the school day with assemblies in the afternoon to capitalise on learning time in the morning.

Equally, the move to half-termly pupil progress meetings is quickly identifying any pupils who are falling behind. In-school information for last term shows some gains in pupils' progress, but there is a significant journey ahead to make sure that all pupils make accelerated progress and exceed national expectations, especially in writing.

Your new Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body are reinvigorating governors' work. They are passionately committed to moving the school to good in a sustainable way, and are ready to take on the challenges to develop good governance. Your Chair is making good use of weekly meetings with you to keep apprised of the rate of improvement. The Chair and Vice Chair have rightly identified that all governors must undertake more training to develop a better understanding of achievement data and be able to ask more challenging questions. Work has begun on this with the local authority and the forthcoming partnership work with an outstanding school is well-targeted to help governors learn about how to challenge senior leaders. Governors are starting to ask more searching questions about the impact of the pupil premium funding.

The quick response to the requirement for an external review of governance is helping the governing body move forward quickly. Findings in the report from the external review are accurate. Recommendations in the report by a National Leader of Governance are being used well by governors to devise an action plan.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority's decision to issue a warning notice to the school in September 2013 has subsequently ensured that all leaders, governors and local authority officers have a realistic understanding of strengths and areas needing improvement. Senior officers are checking the progress of the school effectively through regular partnership board meetings. Minutes from these meetings show a good balance of support and robust challenge. The work with local authority English and mathematics experts and local leaders of education is developing middle leaders' skills, strengthening practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage and helping all leaders and teachers revisit strategies for improving writing. The impact of some of this work is at an early stage.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Bexley.

Yours sincerely

Joanna Beckford-Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector