

Tribal
Kings Orchard
One Queen Street
Bristol
BS2 0HQ

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

Direct T 0117 311 5359
Email: christina.bannerman@tribalgroup.com

14 November 2014

Mrs Petrina Winsor
Executive Headteacher
Parsons Down Infant School
Paynesdown Road
Thatcham
RG19 3TE

Dear Mrs Winsor

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Parsons Down Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 11 November 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 September 2014. 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:

- strengthen the development plan to make it clear what will happen, when and how progress will be checked and impact evaluated
- set out clearly plans to improve the teaching and learning of writing and the achievement of more-able pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and your senior team, middle leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I walked around the school with

your head of school and assistant headteacher to see the classes at work, evaluated the school development plan and looked at other key documents.

Context

There have been no staff changes since the last inspection. The assistant headteacher is leaving at Christmas to work abroad. A replacement has been appointed. She will join the school in January 2015.

Main findings

The findings of the recent inspection came as no surprise to you, your senior leaders and governors. You had already accurately identified the school's weaknesses and started to address them last school year.

The strategic school development plan is a comprehensive document. It brings together the self-evaluation for the two schools in the partnership, takes account of the most recent inspection findings, and outlines plans for improvement. As such, it is clear why you have identified the long-term aims and the key priorities for this school year. Staff I talked to were clear what needs to improve. The plan is not, however, specific enough about what will happen, and when, this year. Short-term plans focusing on one aspect of teaching at a time make improvement more manageable, but mean plans to improve writing or the achievement of more-able pupils are not precise enough yet. There is no overview to make sure that everything is covered during the year. This, and start and finish dates which are not always specific enough, means that there is potential for slippage. Mapping activities on a term-by-term and weekly basis, and making sure that those staff responsible for leading activities are not monitoring their implementation, would help checks that the plan stays on track.

It was evident from our discussions and walk around school that, by using a range of information, you and your senior leaders know where teaching is stronger and where it needs to improve. Individual action plans show that support and challenge for teachers are carefully targeted. You have started to review the work and development of support staff. Middle leaders are increasingly sharing responsibility for improvement. Each half term they focus on improving particular aspects of teaching and learning with their team or across the school. Weekly book checks involving all leaders are used to monitor the impact of this work. The analysis of information about pupils' achievement is more thorough. There is a greater focus on looking at progress over time, particularly for vulnerable groups. Meetings to set targets for pupils are held earlier in the year so that teachers know sooner what they are aiming for. It has not yet been made clear to teachers what progress you expect by key points during the year.

There has been concerted action to improve the teaching of reading this term. All staff have been trained to teach phonics, or letters and the sounds that they make. Teachers are now held to account for developing pupils' phonics skills through specific performance management targets. Your reading manager has more time to keep a careful check on pupils' skills, identify gaps in their learning and weaknesses in teaching. She shares this information promptly with staff so that they are clear exactly what the pupils in their group need to learn next. Weekly meetings with staff focus on improving different aspects of teaching reading skills. Teaching assistants are being trained to provide additional support for pupils who are not making sufficient progress. I saw evidence in the classes we visited that the focus on reading is starting to have a positive impact. There is daily, direct teaching of letters and the sounds they make from the beginning of the Reception year. Pupils are grouped according to their skills so that teaching can focus precisely on what they need to learn. The school's information indicates that a higher proportion of pupils will have the phonics skills they need by the end of Year 1.

Governors feel that they are getting better, more succinct information to help them understand more easily how well the school is doing. They are aware that they can refer to national data and reports from the local authority to satisfy themselves that the school's information is accurate. The governors' role in evaluating the impact of the school development plan and holding senior leaders to account is not clear enough. You have started to develop performance indicators to help them measure progress along the way but these are not yet complete.

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 knows your school well. Officers identified the likelihood it would be judged to require improvement last year and supported you in a thorough review to pinpoint what needed to improve. They have committed additional support for the school this year, although you and officers have not yet discussed exactly how this will be used. Importantly, they will monitor closely the progress of both schools in the partnership.

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

Yours sincerely

Alison Bradley
Her Majesty's Inspector