

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 5323
Email: suzy.smith@tribalgroup.com

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Mrs L Gedling
Acting Headteacher
Durrington Middle School
Salvington Road
Worthing
BN13 2JD

Dear Mrs Gedling

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Durrington Middle School

Following my visit to your school on 3–4 March 2015, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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 better use of governor visits to check progress towards the action plan

Evidence

This inspection focused on the impact of leadership following the monitoring inspection in September 2014. During the inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher, the consultant headteacher, other senior leaders, middle level leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. Brief visits were made to all classes and a teachers' planning session was observed. The school's action plan was

evaluated and senior leaders' documentation relating to checks on the school's work was reviewed. The checks made on staff about their suitability to work with children were also reviewed.

Context

Since the inspection in September 2014 the headteacher has resigned. The local authority worked with the governors to appoint a consultant headteacher in October 2014, to support the school for three days a week. The deputy headteacher is acting headteacher and two of the assistant headteachers are acting deputy headteachers. All these arrangements are temporary until July 2015. Governors are working with the local authority to secure leadership arrangements from September 2015. New subject leaders have been appointed for English and mathematics, and all staff have been allocated to a curriculum team.

Main findings

Since the last monitoring inspection in September 2014 the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders have been clarified. Leaders know exactly what part they play within the senior leadership team, and work much more closely together. Communication has greatly improved because there are short daily meetings for leaders to discuss their work and share any emerging issues. As a result there is no longer unnecessary duplication of work and leaders report they feel 'much more focused and not so overwhelmed.' Each leader is on duty one day a week, greeting pupils as they arrive at school and visiting classrooms. Consequently they are more visible to staff, parents and pupils: if any problems arise they are tackled swiftly. The new duty logs effectively enable senior leaders to share any actions, for example if they call a parent, so their time is used more efficiently.

The school's action plan details all the right priorities. It usefully sets out when each area will be tackled so teachers know what to expect. The helpful milestones enable leaders to track progress towards each target. Leaders hold weekly meetings with all staff to ensure everyone knows what to focus on, and teachers appreciate the 'more joined-up' approach across the federation.

There are new, rigorous systems to check the school's work. Leaders examine the work of the school through the recently-introduced '*A day in the life of...*' approach. This systematic review of lessons, books and classroom environments gives them insight into learning in each year group. They provide helpful feedback for each teacher, and follow up to make sure their advice has been implemented. Teaching is improving as a result. Leaders are sensibly accompanying teachers on visits to other schools to see good practice. This is helping to raise teachers' expectations of what can be achieved.

Teachers have been trained to use the new electronic system for tracking pupils' progress. They are rightly expected to take more responsibility for deciding the support pupils receive if they are falling behind. Leaders have a better overview because they now all use the same system to check how well pupils are doing. They analyse information carefully to identify any weaknesses, and plan remedial action. Leaders have correctly identified the need for a more consistent approach when reporting data to different audiences, including governors.

The newly-created subject leader posts for English and mathematics have strengthened the leadership team. Subject leaders are also class teachers and provide a useful link between senior leaders and the teaching team. They have started to check work in their subjects and lead training to speed improvements. They act as role models for good teaching and ensure any initiatives put in place are manageable for teachers. Teachers are starting to use these new leaders as the first port of call for any queries, freeing senior leaders for other duties. In addition all teachers belong to one of the newly-formed subject teams, which enable them to develop their skills and take more responsibility with colleagues' support. This is helping to give teachers ownership of the new curriculum.

Leaders and governors are acting swiftly to implement recommendations from the recent pupil premium review. The progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils is checked more carefully by leaders and governors and support is put in place more quickly if needed. The special educational needs coordinator is developing helpful questionnaires for pupils, so that leaders can judge the effectiveness of any additional support. Governors suggest practical ways to support disadvantaged pupils, such as providing 'starter packs' so pupils have the right access to resources and uniform when they start school.

Communication with parents has been strengthened. The extra opportunities to see children's work at the end of the day were well received. The new 'Parents and Staff of Durrington Schools' group involves parents more fully in the life of the school through its focus on school improvement and fundraising.

The external review of governance helped governors make useful refinements to their practice. A good start has been made: governors are assigned to key areas and make more regular visits to develop their understanding. However, these visits are not all linked precisely enough to the school action plan to help governors measure the school's effectiveness. Governors have sensibly implemented a policy for test administration, to ensure everyone is aware of their responsibilities and the correct procedures to follow.

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 work of the local authority is effective. There is helpful support for school leaders to identify priorities for their work and to moderate judgements. Governors are given useful information to help them make important decisions about leadership.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard
Her Majesty's Inspector