

Tribal Education
1-4 Portland Square T 08456 40 40 40
BRISTOL enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
BS2 8RR www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Miss D Mansfield
Millbrook Combined School
Mill End Road
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire
HP12 4BA

Dear Miss Mansfield

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 18 November 2009, for the time you and your deputy gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass my thanks on to the teaching, support and administrative staff, all of whom went out of their way to assist me on what was an extremely busy day for the school.

Significant changes since the last inspection include

- the appointment in September 2008 of the deputy headteacher, currently coordinating Upper Key Stage 2
- the appointment of the Early Years Foundation Stage leader
- the incorporation of the special educational needs role into the new post of inclusion coordinator
- the appointment of a learning mentor/attendance officer
- a vacancy for a science coordinator
- a different school improvement partner
- improved provision for outdoor play
- refurbishment of the swimming pool for school and community use
- the opening of a children's centre on the school site.

As a result of the inspection on 15-16 May 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards and achievement, especially in writing and for more able pupils
- improve teaching, ensuring consistency in managing pupils, delivering challenging lessons and guiding pupils
- work with parents to improve attendance.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. Good progress has been made in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Attainment is significantly below that found nationally. Exceptionally, in 2008, Key Stage 2 results rose significantly, reaching national averages. In 2009, Key Stage 2 results missed overambitious targets for English, mathematics and science. However, 52% of the pupils achieved at least Level 4 in both English and mathematics, meeting the school's target. Key Stage 1 writing results were similar to the national figure, reflecting the school's focus on this aspect. Appropriate support strategies and programmes, for example appointing an inclusion coordinator and setting for mathematics in Year 4, are beginning to increase pupils' skills and knowledge. While standards in English, mathematics and science remain below average, improvements are evident in handwriting, presentation and content of work, particularly, but not exclusively, that of younger pupils. Eradicating gaps in older pupils' learning requires more time.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage classes enjoy the improved range of outdoor play facilities. Systematic and enthusiastic teaching of sounds is improving their progress in speaking and early writing development. The school's records show an increase in the progress made by various groups of pupils across the school. For example, the gap between the achievement of the school's Pakistani pupils compared to Pakistani pupils nationally, narrowed significantly in 2008 and 2009, reflecting the carefully targeted support these pupils received. The school's records show that Year 6 pupils are on track to meet their challenging targets in 2010.

The headteacher has successfully created an ethos where teaching and learning can develop and flourish. Millbrook is lively and inviting with stimulating displays, well-organised classrooms and impressive library provision. Relationships are pleasant and productive. Parents' and carers' views are sought and acted upon and they are made welcome in the school. Courses, run in conjunction with other providers on the site, help parents to support their children's learning more effectively. For example, the headteacher and the inclusion officer attend the Afro-Caribbean Parents support meetings in the community. Teachers are fully committed to developing a more creative curriculum that meets the pupils' specific needs. Pupils enjoy lessons more than before, encouraging them to put greater effort into their learning. For some, like the well-supported, vulnerable pupils in Year 2, this greater level of enjoyment has led to more regular attendance.

The school's capacity to sustain improvement is evidenced by the good progress made in improving teaching and implementing interesting, relevant and more active lessons, despite many staff changes. Activities planned at three or more levels of complexity present a good level of challenge in most classes. However, where this is not planned, and work is either too difficult or too easy for some pupils, the behaviour of a few declines and progress slows. The headteacher and deputy headteacher know the strengths in teaching and learning and the areas requiring

further development or improvement. Their judgement that teaching is satisfactory overall with good elements is borne out by inspection. Rightly, they are determined to ensure consistency in the application of school policies and practices.

The learning mentor's work, together with an appropriate range of strategies and rewards for individuals and classes, has resulted in better timekeeping and a reduction in the numbers taking extended or term-time holidays. The proportion of pupils with low attendance has decreased slightly, but at 30% remains too high. Attendance remains considerably below the national figure. A mitigating factor is the high turnover of pupils. Almost 30% of pupils enter or leave the school other than at the start or end of a school year. A further factor that has hindered the school's actions to improve attendance is the lack of support from the educational welfare service during the spring and summer terms of 2009. The situation has improved this term and the service is providing appropriate support to the school. However, the school reports that there is often a lengthy delay before the educational welfare officer confirms that ex-pupils can be removed from the school roll.

Managers are developing effective monitoring and assessment skills by working alongside senior colleagues. Teachers confirm that they receive good support from local authority consultants. Targeted training is helping coordinators and key stage leaders to use data more effectively to drive up standards. Strengthening links with schools in dissimilar areas is helping teachers to develop a wider perspective and is leading to joint teaching projects. The school is a hub for a wide range of community services and activities. Close work with these and other local providers promotes pupils' understanding of the benefits of harmonious community relations.

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

Yours sincerely

Cathie Munt
Her Majesty's Inspector