

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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

Direct T 03000 131 563
victoria.stinton@ofsted.gov.uk



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Ms V Evans
Headteacher
Akrotiri Primary School
BFPO 57
Cyprus

Dear Ms Evans

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Akrotiri Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 1 October 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 October 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:

- track the progress of girls carefully, particularly those who are more able, to ensure that they achieve as well as they can in both Key Stages 1 and 2
- ensure that mechanisms are in place to enable the subject leader for mathematics to maintain a well-founded view of strengths and areas for development in mathematics in Key Stage 1
- improve the quality of induction for learning support assistants by placing more emphasis on how best they can support learning.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, a group of learning support assistants, and the Chair and members

of the School Governance Committee (SGC), to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A telephone conversation was held with the school's inspector-adviser prior to the inspection. The school's current action plan was evaluated. A learning walk was conducted in the Foundation Stage, accompanied by the assistant headteacher who leads this phase. Some writing lessons in Key Stages 1 and 2 were observed jointly with the headteacher and, during these visits, work in pupils' books was reviewed. A range of the school's documentation was taken into account including a leadership review carried out by Service Children's Education during the summer term.

Context

Two deputy headteachers and three teachers joined the school at the beginning of this term.

Main findings

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving. This was the central focus of the school's work in the last academic year. Nonetheless, analysis of monitoring shows that not all teaching is consistently good or better. Sensible strategies have been put in place to address the relatively weaker teaching.

There were strengths in the writing lessons observed with engaging topics for pupils to write about. These included a recent visit to a local zoo and an imaginary island created by pupils. Pupils benefited from opportunities to talk to a partner in preparation for writing because teachers kept the activity brisk and sharply focused. Pupils show pride in their work; their books are well presented and they respond diligently to teachers' feedback. Pupils understand how learning objectives are graduated in difficulty and are able to comment thoughtfully on whether they are ready to step up a gear. They read their own work confidently to their class and, even when spellings are inaccurate, pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the links between letters and sounds. Learning was less effective where lessons moved at a slower, less engaging pace. Visits to the Foundation Stage showed improved use of the outdoor learning spaces with more planned opportunities for children to develop a range of skills. Children were responding to these enthusiastically, showing considerable concentration and persistence in tackling challenges.

The school demonstrates its commitment to developing the skills of learning support assistants through the range of opportunities they have to complete courses, some of which are accredited. However, although an induction programme is in place which covers essential issues such as safeguarding, senior leaders and learning support assistants acknowledge that more practical opportunities to see how best to support learning in the classroom would be beneficial.

Improvements in teaching, learning and assessment have had a positive impact so that, overall, pupils' achievement in 2015 was above average. This was the case in

the Foundation Stage, the Year 1 phonics screening, and pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. However, boys outperformed girls in both Key Stages 1 and 2 and more able girls did not do as well as expected. Although there are improvements in attainment in writing, an area identified for improvement at the section 5 inspection, these are not yet consistent. Results were well-above average for both boys and girls in spelling, punctuation and grammar indicating that pupils have a well-developed grasp of the mechanics of writing.

Despite the improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement, the school's progress towards becoming good is uneven. A review of the school's leadership by Service Children's Education (SCE) at the end of the summer term identified a range of significant shortcomings. The headteacher has made a resolute start in dealing with these issues but it is too soon to evaluate fully the impact of the actions taken so far this term.

With the intention of gaining ownership and understanding, at the beginning of term the headteacher led staff in a collaborative process to establish priorities for the year and to draw up an action plan to deliver these. Initially for this term only, the plan is accompanied by a weekly calendar showing when activities such as monitoring teachers' planning or looking at work in pupils' books, will take place. Staff feel more confident that they know what is expected of them and when.

With two new deputy headteachers now in post, the school's leadership capacity has clearly increased, which was an area for improvement at the previous inspection. Roles and responsibilities for senior leaders have been agreed, including line and performance management of staff. Staff who met the inspector said they were pleased to have clear links to senior leaders who have responsibility for each key stage and aspects of the school's work, such as assessment and the curriculum. Staff welcome the open and rapid responses the deputy headteachers are providing and say that they are quickly getting to grips with priorities. This additional capacity is enabling the assistant headteachers, who stepped into the breach last year, to return to fulfilling their own roles.

A series of weekly meetings for senior leaders, teachers and learning support assistants has been established to ensure that information is shared. Senior leaders are now meeting regularly, although a system for minuting and following up on decisions is not fully in place. Better use is being made of basic communication routes such as the staffroom notice board and staff meetings are planned until the end of this term. Staff spoken to feel that these steps are going some way to improve communication and, consequently, there are signs of improvement in staff morale.

Although some of the work of middle leaders was adversely affected by restricted senior leadership capacity last year, the development of a new curriculum and an assessment system to accompany it continued. Middle leaders have benefited from collaboration with other island schools in these, and other, areas. The school is

ready to trial a new system for assessment this year. Subject action plans are well founded as priorities arise from national initiatives as well as an analysis of pupils' performance, both in tests and in their books. However, gathering this information for mathematics in Key Stage 1 is not as straightforward as it is for English, where there are staff with responsibility for leading English in both key stages.

The school's commitment to developing middle leaders is evident in the number following nationally recognised professional development qualifications. Each senior leader is responsible for coaching a middle leader as part of these courses.

The SGC is highly committed to and supportive of the school's work. Members are determined to follow up on the issues raised by the leadership review and plan to evaluate progress on these at the end of term. The SGC has formed two sub-committees to manage governance, including monitoring the school's work and challenging leaders. Monitoring activities that enable members to gain a first hand view of the school's work are included in the school's action plan. Several members attended the recent parents' forum, which was not well supported, and have helpful strategies planned to improve communication with parents. They are devising a questionnaire to gather parents' views later in the term.

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

External support

Collaboration between island schools and an external consultant on the development of a new assessment system is proving very productive. As a consequence, the school is well placed to trial the system this year and develop it further. Subject leaders value the joint working in English and mathematics. The school has had some useful support from SCE on early years practice.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the School Governance Committee and the Director of Education Services, Directorate of Children and Young People, at the Ministry of Defence.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector