

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancs Investment
Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
W10 0TC

T 0300 123 1231

Text Phone: 0161 618 8524

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566 937

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct ail:jsimmons@cfbt.com



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Ms S Tomlinson
Headteacher
Willow Wood Community Primary School
Bradbury Road
Wharton
Winsford
Cheshire
CW7 3HN

Dear Ms Tomlinson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Willow Wood Community Primary School, Cheshire West and Chester

Following my visit to your school on 8 October 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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. Please also thank the governors, staff and pupils who talked to me about the school.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 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:

- review the school development plan so that an overall vision of what must be achieved for the school to be good, within an eighteen month timeframe, is crystal clear
- include in the development plan key review points so that governors, staff and parents can check the progress the school is making and avoid any slippage
- continue to discuss with staff the key indicators which make the quality of teaching good or better so that they will improve their practice further
- enable governors to further increase their opportunities to check on the school's progress to good.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, three senior leaders, four members of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and a group of pupils to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plans were evaluated. I scrutinised records of lesson observations and learning walks; records of book scrutinies, pupil progress information, a sample of pupils' books, policies and governor minutes.

Context

Since the inspection the headteacher has moved some staff into different classes. The Year 1 teacher has moved into Reception; the Reception teacher is now leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage; and the Year 6 teacher has moved to Year 5.

Main findings

You are successfully building on improvements recognised at the last inspection with urgency and determination. You have set a steady course for further improvement and your high ambition for the school to become good is reflected in the resolve of senior leaders, staff and governors. Refreshed staff look forward with excitement and energy as they work in teams all pulling in the same direction to achieve a common goal.

You have rightly concentrated on improving the quality of teaching and eradicating inadequate teaching and you feel you have achieved this aim. Systems for checking on teachers' performance have been updated and strengthened so that all staff know their responsibilities. Reviewing the staffing structure has resulted in teachers being placed in classes where they can use their strengths. Well-targeted professional training activities have resulted in teachers knowing what is needed to be a good or better teacher. Coaching from strong practitioners within the school, coupled with observations of outstanding teaching in other schools, has raised teachers' expectations of themselves and their pupils. Processes for managing information on pupils' progress have been tightened so that staff know the levels pupils are working at and can match activities at the correct level. Pupils spoken to say their work is 'mostly just right'. You have set ambitious progress targets for all groups of pupils to achieve but you recognise that to maintain this momentum you need to continue to ensure consistently good and better teaching.

Evidence shows that checks on the quality of teaching, by all senior leaders, are frequent. Precise feedback on their performance includes subject knowledge needed for the lesson and teachers know how to improve. Techniques to support teachers to get better are matched to their individual or collective need. Plans are in place for those teachers who need extra help to improve their teaching. Consequently there is an air of anticipation as planned activity unfolds and teachers witness pupils making

progress. Pupils in Year 6 consider they have made progress already this year for example, 'the number of paragraphs I write', 'my style and my speed in writing' and in mathematics 'I just get it now'.

Senior leaders are now more involved in affecting the quality of teaching. Guidance on the use of basic skills in English tells teachers how to develop literacy across all subjects; the new calculation policy sets out how and what should be taught in each class to ensure progression in each of the four operations. Reviewed organisation of the teaching of letters and sounds shows that pupils are further on in their learning than a similar time last year. Handwriting is improving as senior leaders insist that staff follow agreed guidance and check frequently. The effect of all this work is echoed in the lively classrooms; pupils are keen and excited about their learning and are proud of their achievements.

Action plans are well matched to the school's most significant needs and reflect your desire to bring about change swiftly. However, the action plans only cover the first term. Greater thought needs to be given to the overall progress of the school on its journey to good. The plans need to be captured under an overall view and review points inserted so all involved can plot progress and avoid slippage.

You have the full support of the governing body as they too want to get better and contribute to improvement across the school. There is no doubt that they have placed improving the quality of teaching at the centre of their discussions and decisions. A special meeting of the Governing Body was held to discuss the findings of the inspection report and how they could support and challenge the school more. From this meeting governors wrote an action plan to guide their work and improve their knowledge of the school. This, together with their understanding of pupils' achievement, is giving them a fuller picture of the performance of the school. Nonetheless, there is scope for governors to include more opportunities to monitor and evaluate aspects of the school more rigorously. Governors have not allowed other factors to do with the future of the school to distract them from their core purpose and have set the review of governance for later this week.

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 school receives regular support from the local authority through the school improvement adviser meetings. The adviser helped the school to establish links with an outstanding school for leadership and to enable observations of outstanding teaching.

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

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew
Her Majesty's Inspector