

Prospects Learning Services Ltd
132-138 High Street
Bromley
Kent
BR1 1EZ

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 020 8313 7760
Direct F 020 8464 3393



28 September 2007

Mrs Sue Varley
The Headteacher
The Winchcombe School
Maple Crescent
Shaw
Newbury
RG14 1LN

Dear Mrs Varley

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 21 September 2007, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection in January 2007, the school was asked to

- raise achievement and standards in English and mathematics, making sure that activities match what pupils need to learn next and are sufficiently challenging
- improve the quality of teaching, especially raising expectations of what pupils can achieve, making sure that learning is brisk and purposeful and using marking more effectively to guide pupils on how to improve.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making inadequate progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Since the January inspection, there has been significant staff turnover. Almost half of the class teachers are newly appointed and a new deputy headteacher has joined the leadership team.

The Foundation Stage unit continues to provide a satisfactory education for its children. From low starting points children make satisfactory progress. There is some good teaching within the unit. However, its impact is lessened because planning is not always adjusted to meet the children's individual needs identified during the course of each day. In addition, the information gathered about children's achievements is not analysed in enough detail. This means that weaknesses within areas of learning are not fully appreciated.

Not enough progress has been made in raising achievement and standards in English and mathematics. Consequently, the pupils continue to underachieve in Key Stages 1 and 2. The school has been receiving intensive support from the local authority since September 2006. However, the school acknowledges that it failed to provide the leadership necessary to make best use of this support last year. Teachers' expectations of their pupils remain too low, and this often results in undemanding tasks being set for them. This situation is compounded by the inadequate checks made on pupils' progress.

Standards remain low. Although results for 2007 are provisional, the school's performance in the National Curriculum assessments and tests administered last term has declined. In each key stage, results were at least ten percentage points lower than in 2006 in all areas tested. At the end of Key Stage 1, fewer than half the pupils attained the level expected nationally in reading and writing. In mathematics, two-thirds of pupils reached this level. At the end of Key Stage 2, only about half the pupils attained the nationally expected level in English and mathematics, while three-quarters reached this level in science. More able pupils also underachieved. In each key stage, far too few pupils exceeded the levels expected for their age. However, pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities continue to achieve well because their future learning is carefully mapped out and their progress is regularly monitored.

In all year groups, too many pupils are unable to read or write with any degree of fluency because they lack basic strategies. A large majority of pupils have very limited skills in performing basic mental calculations in mathematics because they have not been taught the methods required.

Efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning have not had sufficient impact. There is still not enough good teaching to tackle the pupils' longstanding underachievement. Some introductions to lessons are too long, and teachers do not tell pupils precisely what they expect of them. Consequently lessons continue to lack pace and challenge. The teachers do not consistently pitch work at the right level. In some cases, the work is too difficult. For example, during the introduction to a lesson in Year 5 pupils were expected to arrange decimal fractions in the correct order, but many were unable to do so. This occurred because information about the pupils' previous attainment was not available for the new class teacher. In other cases, work is too easy because teacher's expectations are too low. For instance, in a lesson for a mixed-age class of pupils in Key Stage 1, Year 2 pupils of all abilities were given an undemanding colouring activity as they identified odd numbers.

Improvements in the quality of marking have resulted in pupils now being given satisfactory guidance about what they need to do to improve their work. The teachers make useful comments and there is some evidence of pupils responding well to the observations made.

Throughout the school, procedures for using information about pupils' learning to help teachers plan their lessons are inadequate. Systems for recording teachers' assessments of their pupils are underdeveloped. The lack of well-established procedures for tracking pupils' progress means that managers cannot objectively monitor the impact of current initiatives.

In the lessons visited, behaviour was generally good and relationships between teachers and their pupils positive. This provides a secure platform for future improvement.

The support provided by the local authority has not been effective. This situation is being remedied. However, the school feels that it does not have enough of a say in evaluating the support provided by the authority during the regular project meetings where progress is monitored.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Mike Thompson
Additional Inspector