

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



11 February 2008

Mr David Maloney
The Headteacher
Westminster City School
55 Palace Street
London
SW1E 5HJ

Dear Mr Maloney

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff and pupils gave when I inspected your school on 30 January 2008, for the time you gave to phone discussions before the visit, and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the educational consultant from the local authority (LA) who spoke with me. He and a representative from United Westminster Schools joined you and your deputy for the verbal feedback I gave at the end of the day.

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 by improving the quality of teaching and learning
- Improve the use of assessment to set challenging targets and monitor progress
- Ensure that all middle managers contribute effectively to school improvement
- Improve urgently strategic leadership in the sixth form
- Continue to improve the school building to provide a better climate for learning.

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

Since the last inspection, results in national tests and examinations have fallen, as has the school's ranking on contextualised value-added (CVA) measures that describe pupils' progress from Years 7 to 11. Targets were not met.

Results in the end of Year 9 tests, based on average point scores, fell from significantly above the national average overall in 2006 to average in 2007. Results show that the Year 9 pupils taking national tests in 2007 made broadly satisfactory

progress over Years 7 to 9; their progress was better than that for the previous two year groups.

GCSE results in 2007, based on average points scores and on the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C, dropped from average in 2006 to significantly below average. The percentage of pupils achieving at least one GCSE or equivalent remained high at 99%. The achievement of pupils taken over Years 7 to 11, however, was significantly less than that of similar pupils elsewhere, and it has been so since 2004. In particular, progress in English and mathematics was significantly less than average. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is slightly better than that of their peers.

In the sixth form, A-level results improved slightly in 2007. Students' progress, however, was lower in 2007 than in 2006. Whilst students' progress is very good in some subjects at A-level, underachievement in some others has been the case for a few years and was not eradicated in 2007.

In the main school, considerable disparities exist in pupils' relative performance between subjects. One of the most notable is in relation to design and technology where shortcomings in pupils' progress have existed for some years and still persist. In this and other subjects where pupils' underachieved in 2007, action has been, or is being, taken to address the underlying problems such as curriculum planning or staffing and management issues.

The inspection report of January 2007 stated that 'systems for checking the quality of the school's work, whilst satisfactory and improving, currently lack consistency.' These systems were not effective in the last academic year in showing up shortcomings in pupils' progress and the school did not anticipate the drop in test and examination results. The systems have been improved this year but more remains to be done to ensure that senior managers can more easily identify areas of success or concern in relation to whole subject areas, teaching groups, or other sub-groups of pupils. The school does, however, have good systems for keeping each individual pupil's progress under review but this information is used to variable effect by teachers and subject leaders.

Information about pupils' current attainment suggests that GCSE examination results may go up in 2008. The school's 2008 target of 69% of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A*- C is challenging and the school hopes to achieve a figure of between 60% and 64% if not more. The attainment on entry of the current Year 11 cohort of pupils is higher than in the previous year and a rise in standards might therefore be expected in 2008. The school is not able to demonstrate convincingly, however, that the rate of pupils' progress is likely to improve in 2008.

The inspection report of January 2007 judged pupils' personal development as good overall and, based on evidence from this one-day visit, this is still the case. Pupils behave well in the main and the school functions calmly and harmoniously. Low level disruptions do occur in some lessons. Pupils are confident and considerate in their interactions with each other, staff and visitors and give their opinions gladly and courteously. They are suitably prepared for their future economic well-being.

The school has worked to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning. In particular it has supported teachers in making better use of assessment techniques and to set pupils challenging targets. In some lessons, too little diagnostic work is done by the teacher to discover the extent of pupils' understanding, and the range of strategies for doing so is limited. Conversely, there is excellent practice where teachers demonstrate high quality questioning skills, for example, that encourage full participation from students and enhance their enjoyment and learning. Senior leaders are aware of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning. The LA, in a review of the school undertaken in November 2007, stated, 'Most students are making satisfactory progress with their learning in lessons but good practice is not routinely established in all areas across the school.' The LA review also found a significant minority of lessons to be unsatisfactory.

The school and LA are correct in stating that 'the classroom observation system has some strengths' and this system is indeed helping the school to lift the quality of lessons. However, the comments that leaders write in the 'Learning' section of the good lesson observation proformas do not generally state what has been learned by pupils; they relate mainly to attitudinal aspects of learning. Whilst important, these aspects do not alone provide sufficient evidence through which to judge pupils' progress in lessons. Staff are not guided clearly enough in that proforma to judge lesson quality in terms of exactly what new knowledge, skills or understanding pupils have acquired.

Just under a fifth of teachers are new to the school this year and there are also a few longer-term absences. These facts put pressure on senior staff to secure good induction, consistency of practice, and maintain the professional development of staff. The headteacher and governors have taken stringent action where required in recent years to address major shortcomings in teaching, and are continuing to do so.

The quality of middle management, in the school's own view, is variable and this is borne out in the quality of departmental test and examination analyses and self-evaluations, as well as in the outcomes themselves. For example, poor progress in design and technology is linked to unsatisfactory provision and weaknesses in leadership and management of this subject. School development plans show clearly the school's efforts to hold middle managers to account for the educational outcomes that pupils and student achieve, and progress in developing managers' skills is visible. Training has been provided in the use of computerised systems for tracking pupils' progress, in lesson observations and other forms of self-evaluation. In their evaluations, subject leaders make apposite comments about the academic standards attained. Less clear, if they exist at all in the evaluations, are comments on pupils' and students' progress through which subject effectiveness can be judged and improved where necessary.

The school has successfully addressed the issue from the last inspection regarding leadership and management in the sixth form. A new head of sixth form was appointed from September 2007 at assistant headteacher level. He has made an accurate appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses in educational provision and outcomes. He also has the confidence of staff and students and their support in

beginning to make improvements where necessary through an appropriate action plan. Most importantly, the system of keeping a close check on students' academic progress has been strengthened. It remains to be seen if this improvement and others have a positive impact on students' achievement as the school intends.

The overall quality of the school's accommodation is still poor although work has just begun to improve it. Some temporary teaching rooms have been erected on the site, in view of the imminent demolition of the sixth form block and another block, and more will follow. Sixth form students are about to be accommodated in a nearby college building as well as in the main school. The LA review of November 2007 states, 'The school is in the first tranche of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme and there has been assiduous planning and preparation work for BSF by the headteacher and governors. This has made considerable demands on the headteacher's time in 2006-7.' The new building is expected to be complete in 2010. An area of particular concern is accommodation for design and technology. The space available for this subject is very cramped and extremely messy. It does not constitute a proper place of work for staff or pupils neither does it do anything to inspire or promote pupils' development in this subject. It is in need of urgent improvement.

The LA responded to the drop in test and examination results by increasing its support for the school. It conducted a thorough and helpful review in December 2007 and highlighted both existing strengths and areas for development. An educational consultant from the LA is working with the school and has drawn up a support plan which covers the right key priorities for improvement, but it is rather far-ranging in some of the specific actions. The consultant and the headteacher have discussed how this plan can be worked on alongside the school's own development plans and expect that some items can be dealt with quickly, trimmed or postponed. This is an appropriate response so that the school can realistically tackle the most important actions for improvement, at a time when building works will also demand considerable attention from senior staff.

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

Yours sincerely

Wiola Hola
Her Majesty's Inspector