

Prospects Learning Services Ltd  
Prospects House  
19 Elmfield Road  
Bromley, Kent  
BR1 1LT

T 08456 40 40 40  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Direct T 020 8315 1250  
Direct F 020 8315 1279  
[Peter.Sanderson@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:Peter.Sanderson@ofsted.gov.uk)



9 July 2009

Mr Jon Gray  
Headteacher  
Willowcroft Community School  
Mereland Road  
Didcot  
OX11 8BA

Dear Mr Gray

Fresh Start: monitoring inspection of Willowcroft Community School

## Introduction

Following my visit with Kath Beck, Additional Inspector, to your school on 1 and 2 July 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school opened in September 2007.

## Evidence

During the visit, 10 part-lessons were observed. A range of documents were scrutinised and meetings were held with members of the senior leadership team, a governor, pupils and the local authority school improvement leader. Samples of pupils' work were also examined.

## Context

Two parent governors have been appointed to the governing body since the last monitoring inspection. There are currently no vacancies on the governing body.

## Achievement and standards

Children entered the Early Years Foundation Stage in September 2008 with skills and knowledge below expectations for their age, exhibiting notable weaknesses in some aspects of communication, language and literacy. They have made good progress during the course of this year as a result of good teaching and learning. Children will enter Year 1 with skills and knowledge broadly similar to those expected for their

age in most areas of learning, but below expected levels in some areas of mathematical development, reading and writing.

The senior leadership team has developed a good central system to track the progress of pupils towards their targets in Years 1 to 6. However, they are aware of some inconsistency in the quality of assessment, particularly in Key Stage 1. The Year 2 teacher assessments indicate that this year standards rose in writing, remained at a similar level in mathematics but fell in reading. As a result, standards attained by this year group remain well below the national average, with very few pupils attaining the higher levels. However, lesson observations during this visit and the school's tracking data indicate that these pupils made satisfactory progress during Key Stage 1. The entry profile of the current Year 1 was closer to those expected for their age and pupils are on track to attain higher standards at the end of Year 2. Standards in Years 4 and 5 are broadly average but they remain well below average in Year 3.

The school has recently received its Key Stage 2 test results in mathematics and science. Standards have risen in both of these subjects and are now close to the national average. These pupils made satisfactory progress between Years 3 and 6, with good progress made during the last two years, which have been at Willowcroft School.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in December 2008:

- continue to improve standards, particularly in writing – satisfactory progress

### Personal development and well-being

Pupils say that this is a happy, friendly school where children look after each other in lessons and in the playground. They enjoy working with their classmates, sharing ideas and helping one another to learn. The school's recent anti-bullying initiative has proved successful, and so the vast majority of pupils are confident and attend regularly. The amount of persistent absence has been significantly reduced. Good behaviour in lessons and around the school means there is an atmosphere where learning is valued. One child said, 'We are achieving a lot better now, as teachers listen to us and help us if we don't get something.' Pupils appreciate and respond well to the trust placed in them to behave sensibly when working outside the classroom. They also appreciate the opportunities they have to be independent in carrying out their responsibilities as playground leaders and as school and eco-councillors. In particular, they are proud that their design for the forest area of the school has won an award, which has given them the money to buy a shed in which to store their gardening tools. New playground equipment has just been installed according to the pupils' designs. High-quality provision in the Nurture group means these pupils are growing in maturity and their behaviour is improving. Some have progressed well enough to return to the classes for their age group.

## Quality of provision

A joint lesson observation carried out with a member of the senior leadership team during this inspection confirmed the accuracy of their judgement of teaching and learning. The overall quality of teaching and learning seen during this monitoring inspection was similar to that seen during the last visit. All lessons observed were at least satisfactory, with just over half being good or better. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons well to include engaging activities. Most lessons had a better focus on providing challenge for more able pupils than was seen during the last monitoring inspection. Lessons are characterised by good relationships between pupils and teachers. Pupils behave well and willingly become involved in activities. In the satisfactory lessons, teachers did not always provide tasks to meet the pupils' learning needs, particularly the least able, and on some occasions the pace of the lesson was too slow.

The practical, creative and lively curriculum is capturing pupils' enthusiasm for learning and contributes much to their personal development, regular attendance and good behaviour. Pupils say there are many interesting things for them to do. They get pleasure from their trips to 'forest school'. Residential visits enable them to learn about life away from home. The curriculum is enriched by many after-school clubs, homework projects that involve parents working with their children, and links with schools in Europe and Uganda. Art based on the work of famous artists, such as Picasso and Hockney, has been used effectively to learn about history as well as to challenge pupils' views of stereotypes. Since the last monitoring visit, the school has identified the pupils who are higher attainers or who have a particular gift or talent. The curriculum has been amended to offer them greater challenge and this is beginning to have an impact on their progress. The curriculum for the Early Years Foundation Stage offers many opportunities for children to take part in engaging activities that meet their individual needs and interests. Providing tasks that offer greater challenges in problem solving and that enhance the development of a wider range of vocabulary would further improve provision.

The school's care for all its pupils has been strengthened through its effective links with parents and outside agencies; such links enable the school to provide substantial support to pupils and their families. The breakfast, after-school and holiday clubs give valuable additional help. The excellent provision in the Nurture club gives pupils who are at risk of exclusion the chance to learn to take responsibility for their actions and to acquire the knowledge and skills they need for their future life in an atmosphere that is firm but fair. The school takes care to safeguard its pupils, protect them from risks and help them to stay safe.

Staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage track children's progress frequently through observations, and the information gained is used effectively to plan the next steps in their learning. Assessments are carried out at the end of the Reception Year, as required, but the procedures should be reviewed to ensure they provide an accurate basis on which teachers in Year 1 can build.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in December 2008:

- ensure that the provision for more able and talented pupils is sufficiently rich and challenging – satisfactory progress

### Leadership and management

The headteacher continues to lead the school well. With the support of the effective senior leadership team, he has created a shared vision for all staff based around a curriculum that encourages pupils' creativity and enjoyment of learning. Systems of monitoring and evaluation are sound and the senior leadership team knows the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. Good plans are in place to address areas of identified weakness. As a result, both teachers and pupils say that there is a better climate for learning in Willowcroft than there was in its predecessor school. Leadership of the core subjects continues to develop well, although there is a need to devolve leadership and management responsibilities further to both key stage and subject leaders.

Governors are well informed about the quality of provision and pupils' outcomes in the school. They support the school, although they have not ensured that all statutory policies are fully in place.

### External support

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors work collaboratively with the local authority and its partners. A range of support has been provided by the local authority, including support for subject leadership and for teaching and learning. These have had a positive impact on the progress the school is making. The school improvement leader is providing effective support and challenge and is playing an important role in the school's journey of improvement.

### Main Judgements

The school's overall progress is satisfactory.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality and consistency of teacher assessments, particularly in Key Stage 1.
- Raise standards in literacy and numeracy, particularly in the current Years 2 and 3.

- Further improve the progress made by pupils by increasing the proportion of lessons that are good or better.
- Ensure that all statutory policies are fully in place.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sanderson  
Her Majesty's Inspector