

Tribal Group
1-4 Portland
Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR
T 0845 123 6001
F 0845 123 6002

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



10 June 2009

Ms Gill Winston
The Acting Headteacher
Willowbrook School
Summer Lane
Beacon Heath
Exeter
Devon
EX4 8NN

Dear Ms Winston

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Willowbrook School

Following my visit to your school on 2 June 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

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

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Willowbrook School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 2 June 2009

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the acting headteacher, teaching and support staff, groups of pupils and parents, and three governors, including the chair.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection one governor has resigned and three more have been appointed. There are still three vacancies on the governing body. Appointments have been made to replace temporary teaching staff from September.

Achievement and standards

All teachers are now using assessment data consistently in order to plan work that is well matched to pupils' needs and this is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress. Standards at Key Stage 1 are satisfactory and pupils continue to make good progress. At Key Stage 2, standards are improving, but still remain below average. The level of challenge has improved for those who are more able, but still remains inconsistent. So, although overall pupils' progress is satisfactory, the pace at which pupils are improving varies in different year groups, with some classes making up lost ground more rapidly than others. Across the school, standards in writing are consistently below those in reading and mathematics.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are making satisfactory progress. Provision for pupils who are at the early stages of learning English is greatly improved. It is more consistent and focused on individual needs and, as a result, although overall progress for the majority of these pupils is satisfactory, for some, progress has been exceptionally rapid.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards by ensuring teachers use assessment information consistently to provide suitable challenge for pupils – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

During this visit, parents, pupils and staff all commented on the very positive and happy atmosphere within the school and how much behaviour has improved in recent months. Pupils show a much stronger understanding of the importance of learning, and the individual needs of those with behaviour and learning difficulties are being met effectively. Pupils are very aware of the consequences of misbehaviour because systems are consistently applied by the whole staff. The

improved behaviour across the school has allowed a change to the staggered morning playtime so all pupils can now play together outside. This new arrangement has been welcomed by the whole school community. Pupils enjoy seeing their siblings and support and teaching staff have more opportunity to talk and plan together. One pupil said, 'We all get on much better now. The little ones are safe because we look after them.'

Attendance levels remain stubbornly low, in spite of thorough and consistently applied systems to encourage pupils to attend regularly. These include calling parents on the first day of absence, and successful efforts with outside agencies to reduce the number of persistent non attenders. In Year 6, attendance rates are satisfactory, but are below average for younger pupils, particularly those in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Not all parents are aware of the impact that poor attendance has on pupils' progress and achievement.

Quality of provision

Teaching is consistently good at Key Stage 1. It is more variable at Key Stage 2 and in the Early Years Foundation Stage and this is reflected in the uneven pace at which these pupils are making progress. No teaching is unsatisfactory and some is outstanding. Improvements in behaviour and effective reward systems mean that pupils readily talk about their learning and show great enthusiasm in reaching their targets. Those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with behavioural problems, are managed very effectively, with teaching assistants now encouraging pupils to develop the skills to work independently and take responsibility for their learning. Work is well matched to pupils' individual needs, although in some classes expectations are still not sufficiently demanding for some pupils.

Substantial developments to the curriculum have already been put in place and more are planned for the new academic year, which more comprehensively take into account new national initiatives such as the Rose Review. Very effective subject leadership in both science and information and communication technology (ICT), providing clear guidance, training and support, has given teachers more confidence in teaching these subjects. Strong cross-curricular links have made the curriculum more creative and literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are more consistently embedded into other subjects. A clay project, for example, was used very effectively to develop pupils' writing skills. A lesson was observed where some difficult ICT skills were used to develop art and design and technology work.

Building work for a new outdoor area and reorganised Early Years Foundation Stage accommodation should be complete by September.

Government safeguarding requirements are now met in full.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- ensure there is appropriate balance between subjects in the curriculum to provide all pupils with a broad experience of learning – satisfactory
- ensure that procedures for safeguarding pupils meet current government requirements – now met in full.

Leadership and management

The very strong leadership team, led by the acting headteacher, continues to implement changes rapidly. The ambitious action plan and rigorous monitoring arrangements are continually adapted to match need as improvements become evident, involving staff more and more in taking responsibility for both developing and implementing change. On this visit there was real commitment amongst the teaching and support staff to the changes that have been introduced and confidence that their hard work is beginning to accelerate pupils' progress. They feel that the improvement in pupils' behaviour is making teaching more effective and is encouraging them to take more risks in the classroom. This has led to enormous enthusiasm for the curriculum changes, in spite of the hard work needed to implement them, because staff know that they will have an impact on pupils' achievement. Staff are now offering a wide range of extra-curricular activities both before and after school. Support staff now feel fully involved and communication with them about both strategy and day-to-day operational matters is more consistent. The school is working very effectively with its neighbouring secondary school, particularly supporting managing behaviour, and in science, ICT and mathematics.

New appointments and the experience of established governors combine to make a very enthusiastic, committed and more confident team. Led by a very experienced and able chair, governors are working very hard but are not always sufficiently focused on the urgent need to raise pupils' achievement. With the acting headteacher, they have made stronger links with parents. There is now a weekly newsletter and a revamped website that parents can access. Parents' opinions have been gathered through a questionnaire and the results fed back to them and they are encouraged to attend school assemblies. In order to improve communication and encourage parents into school, one parent governor has set up a room where parents can meet informally just before the end of the school day on Fridays.

The current deputy headteacher has been appointed as substantive headteacher from September. A deputy headteacher has also been appointed from the current school staff. Both these leaders are currently working alongside the acting headteacher and there is a phased plan for the hand over of responsibility. These internal appointments will guarantee continuity as the acting headteacher's contract comes to an end.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve arrangements for senior leaders to monitor the work of the school so they have a more thorough understanding of the school's performance – good

- strengthen the role of the governing body so it can provide effective support and challenge to the school – satisfactory
- strengthen relationships with parents and seek their views each term in order to contribute to the local authority's regular reviews of progress – satisfactory.

External support

Support from the local authority is good. The acting headteacher completes her secondment from the local authority on 31 August. She will continue to support the school when the substantive headteacher takes up her post on 1 September.