

Tribal Education  
1–4 Portland Square  
Bristol  
BS2 8RR

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



9 December 2009

Miss Alexandra Butler  
Acting Headteacher  
The Willows Primary School  
Pyle Hill  
Newbury  
RG14 7SJ

Dear Miss Butler

Fresh Start: monitoring inspection of The Willows Primary School

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 25 and 26 November 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fifth monitoring inspection since the school opened in April 2007.

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work; scrutinised documents; and met with the acting headteacher, deputy headteacher, a group of staff, the chair of governors, the chair of the school's parent–teacher association and later with a few other parents, and with the School Improvement Partner. She spoke with pupils in lessons and break-times and also to some pupils who are members of the school council.

Context

The number of pupils at the school is 203. This is broadly the same as a year ago. There are currently 10 classes. The headteacher left at the end of October and was replaced by an acting headteacher seconded for four days a week from another school in the local authority. Five teachers joined the school in September, two of whom are newly qualified. Four teaching assistants have joined recently. The school has been without a permanent coordinator for special educational needs (SENCO) since Easter 2009. This post is being covered for one day a week by a teacher seconded from yet another school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above average, as is the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational needs, however, is below average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is also lower than average.



Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

The school's work on raising standards and speeding up the rates of pupils' progress has moved forward in some respects but it has also stalled in many others. In view of the fact that pupils' progress is still far too uneven across the school, coupled with the disappointing test results in 2009, it cannot be said that pupils are achieving the standards of which they are capable. Staff and governors are aware that more remains to be done to ensure that pupils' progress is at least adequate in all classes. Current progress is not enough to raise quickly pupils' attainment from a low base.

Provisional test results for pupils in Year 2 in 2009 show a drop from 2008 in all three areas of reading, writing and mathematics. Results were significantly below average in 2008 for reading, and in 2009 they were significantly below average in all three areas. The improvements in teaching and learning seen in Year 2 in the summer of 2009 came too late to have a positive impact. The 2009 test results for pupils in Year 6 also fell from those in 2008, but not back to the very low position of 2007. The percentage of pupils attaining Level 4 in both English and mathematics was 42% in 2009, down from 48% in 2008, but the 2009 cohort of pupils was slightly weaker overall than in 2008. At both key stages, very few pupils reached levels in the national tests above those expected for their ages. The 2009 results for Year 6 show that pupils' progress over Years 3 to 6 was too slow.

Pupils' current work and progress continue to show a mixed picture across the school. School data indicate that end of Year 6 test results are likely to improve in 2010 on those in 2009; this is borne out in pupils' work seen during this and previous visits. Too much variability in the quality of teaching and learning in recent years means that, for other year groups, there is much catching up to do. This is particularly true for pupils currently in Years 3 and 4. The school has put into place additional provision for these pupils in order to drive up standards but it is not apparent if such measures are working. Progress for pupils now in Years 1 and 2 has improved from that seen on previous visits but attainment for most pupils at this stage is still significantly below that expected for their ages. The progress of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage was not a focus of this visit.

Pupils are gaining ground in developing their skills in information and communication technology (ICT). The computer suite is proving to be a valuable and well-used resource to support learning right across the curriculum. Some very recent changes to the curriculum are speeding up pupils' progress in science. As noted on previous visits, there is still more to do to ensure that pupils' skills in subjects beyond English, mathematics, science and ICT develop systematically.

Pupils' enjoyment of school was seen clearly on this visit and in several situations such as singing in assembly, in talking about clubs and activities, and in lessons where activities capture their interest. Pupils exhibit positive attitudes to learning when presented with engaging activities; the reverse is also true.

Since the last visit, some further refinements have been made, with local authority support and advice, in the ways the school keeps a check on pupils' attainment. Not enough has been done yet to improve the way that the school keeps the progress of sub-groups of pupils under review. Record keeping, to show the learning gains of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, has been developed to link outcomes in the Nursery with those in the Reception classes.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in July 2009:

- Improve progress in all year groups by further enhancing the provision of effective teaching and the school's focus on learning outcomes – inadequate progress.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

At the last visit, it was noted that 'the school is a calm, harmonious place in which most pupils behave sensibly and kindly towards each other'. While this is still generally the case, there were rather more disruptions in lessons during this visit than a few months ago. Behaviour is not as good as seen on the previous few visits. Teachers' work to encourage good behaviour is something that constantly demands their attention as many pupils are needy in wide-ranging ways. Staff are working with determination and a consistency of approach to encourage good behaviour. Pupils respond positively to the various reward systems. It clearly matters to them that they 'move up the levels' that recognise their positive contributions.

The school continues with its good work in fostering pupils' personal development, especially in work on relationships, adopting safe and healthy lifestyles, and in lifting pupils' skills in sharing their views confidently and courteously. The school has a higher than average percentage of persistent absentees. The overall attendance figure, while lower than the national average, is broadly in line with similar schools. The highly visible attendance chart in the school hall continues to signal the school's emphasis on promoting good attendance.

The effectiveness of provision

The overall quality of teaching is better than in the past but the rate of improvement is not fast enough. There is still not enough teaching that is better than satisfactory. While there is less of it, some inadequate teaching remains. Pupils' learning and progress in the majority of lessons are now at least satisfactory.

Strengths in teaching are in teachers' good subject knowledge, positive relationships with pupils, and in their very good partnerships with teaching assistants. Teachers often, and rightly, encourage pupils to talk about their ideas. The best teaching provides pupils with tasks that are suitably challenging and engaging, recognises quickly how well pupils are grasping new skills and knowledge, and keeps learning lively and moving with good pace. In weaker lessons, the teacher talks too much, or does not pitch the work at the right level to maintain interest, particularly for some

more able pupils. Staff have created classrooms that are inviting and contain lovely displays of what pupils are learning. A particularly fine example of this is in the Year 6 classroom. The very recently introduced marking policy has some good features.

Development of the curriculum since the last inspection has been only slight. The acting headteacher has taken action very recently to speed up the work to link learning across subject areas and this is already bearing fruit. Pupils enjoy the topics being studied and teachers are clearly alert to the increased possibilities of developing literacy through the study of science or history, for example. Too little progress has been made since the last visit in developing provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language, for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, or for those with specific gifts or talents. The need to underpin the whole-school curriculum overview with clearly set out details of what pupils are expected to learn in each subject year by year still exists; this work has been started but is not complete. The school is increasing its range of enrichment activities. Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is undergoing a thorough review with the appointment of a team of three new teachers, including a team leader. Provision at this stage was not explored fully on this visit other than to check that the concerns raised last July in relation to some aspects of health and safety have been addressed. They have been.

The school's care for pupils' personal well-being continues to have some strengths. Since July, the local authority has conducted a review of the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils and found these to be in order. One point for improvement concerning safeguarding, identified by the inspector on this visit, was dealt with shortly afterwards.

#### The effectiveness of leadership and management

School improvement has faltered as a result of shortcomings in leadership and management over the last few months. Shortcomings include: insufficient induction for teachers new to the school; not enough work undertaken to ensure good quality of teaching and learning; a lack of systematic review and evaluation of the school's work and effectiveness; no update of the school improvement plan; and gaps in performance management for some staff. Senior managers and governors have not ensured that such key pieces of work have been undertaken properly. Staff state that senior managers have found themselves in recent months needing to spend much time on dealing with a plethora of day-to-day issues and incidents. Some middle managers have conducted reviews but the outcomes of these have not contributed to clearly articulated actions within a whole-school plan. Subject leaders have moved forward in seeking to determine how well pupils are acquiring skills in their subjects, but not far enough yet. A plan to raise pupils' achievement is in the process of being produced.

The acting headteacher has quickly appraised the situation and is taking action to steer the school back onto a trajectory of improvement. She is acting decisively to improve provision and outcomes and knows that there should be no delay. The

deputy headteacher has moved forward the school's work on community cohesion, but this is still at a very early stage. The school's financial position is not entirely secure and this fact may require a review of staff deployment or other means to ensure that the school can set a balanced budget in the future.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the monitoring inspection in June 2008:

- Ensure that all elements of safeguarding are fully in place - satisfactory progress.

External support

The local authority has written to the school expressing its concern about the lack of progress since July 2009. It acted swiftly to find an acting headteacher when the substantive headteacher resigned in October. It has also brokered the services of a temporary coordinator for special educational needs. Advisers and consultants have been working with the school and notes of visits show the usefulness of their contributions. The school improvement partner is working with the acting headteacher to fine-tune the nature and pace of support for the school. The local authority is clear that the school will need additional resources beyond those anticipated for the Fresh Start, and expects to provide some, given the challenges the school still faces.

Main Judgements

The school's overall progress is unsatisfactory.

Priorities for further improvement

The school should:

- improve pupils' progress and raise attainment in all year groups by enhancing further the quality of teaching so that more of it is good or better
- set out a comprehensive plan for improving the school quickly; ensure that the school has the capacity in every sense to carry out the plan.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for West Berkshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Wiola Hola

Her Majesty's Inspector