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Mr Jon Gray
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Gray

Fresh Start: monitoring inspection of Willowcroft Community School

Introduction

Following my visit with Sheila Boyle, additional inspector, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school opened in September 2007.

Evidence

During the visit, 11 part lessons were observed. A range of documents were scrutinised and meetings were held with members of the senior leadership team, the chair of governors, pupils and the local authority school improvement leader. Samples of pupils' work were also examined.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection the number of classes has reduced from 11 to 10 with the loss of the nurture group that supported pupils with social and emotional difficulties. The deputy headteacher has left the school for a promotion and one teacher is on maternity leave. One new teaching appointment has been made and the deputy headteacher post filled by an internal promotion. The chair of governors has stepped down from her role and a new chair appointed. There is currently one vacancy on the governing body.



Achievement and standards

Children entered the Early Years Foundation Stage in September 2009 with skills and knowledge below typical expectations for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy and in their knowledge and understanding of the world. Signing has been introduced to support those children with speech and language difficulties and this is helping to improve the communication skills of all pupils. Daily phonics sessions also help children develop early reading and writing skills. Progress over time is particularly good in personal and social development because the staff make good provision for children's pastoral needs. Progress in physical development is improving because of the good outdoor play facilities, which staff use increasingly effectively to promote children's learning and development across the six areas of learning.

The school has improved its system of target-setting in Key Stage 1 and targets are challenging but achievable. A good central system to track the progress of pupils towards their targets is in place. Since the last inspection the leadership team has taken effective action to improve the reliability of teacher assessments in reading and mathematics through support from the local authority and through partnership working with local schools. The accuracy of these assessments is now more robustly monitored. Current Year 2 pupils are on track to achieve their targets in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards in this year group are higher than those seen in Year 2 last year and are broadly similar to the national average.

Better teaching and fair and consistent use of the school's behaviour policy has led to an improved climate for learning in Years 3 and 4. This, along with effective intervention strategies, is leading to improved progress and rising standards in these year groups. Since the last monitoring visit the school has received its provisional Key Stage 2 English results for 2009. As in mathematics and science, standards are slightly above those attained in 2008. However, standards remained below average and the target for the percentage of pupils attaining Level 4 was not attained. These pupils made satisfactory progress between Years 3 and 6, with good progress made during the last two years, which were spent at Willowcroft School. Pupils currently in Year 6 are on track to attain their targets this summer.

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

- Raise standards in literacy and numeracy, particularly in current Years 2 and 3 (now Years 3 and 4) – good progress.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teacher assessments, particularly in Key Stage 1 – good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils speak highly of the school and say they enjoy most of the lessons, particularly those which have practical elements and those that take them to the forest area or

further afield such as trips to the theatre and museum in Oxford. Pupils also enjoy and benefit from the good range of after-school clubs including sport, where they have the opportunity to engage in team events and compete with other schools. Pastoral care for pupils is well coordinated and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from strong links with support agencies and community partnerships. Attendance is improving as a result of the effective measures taken by the school including improved links with parents. The number of exclusions has decreased significantly. Pupils have an increasing number of opportunities to undertake responsibilities around school. Some act as playground leaders, others represent their class on the school council and some sit on the eco-council and take responsibility for promoting energy conservation and recycling. Pupils' attitudes to work have remained positive. They enjoy working with their peers and show respect in class by listening to teachers and to others' points of view. Their efforts and achievement are recognised and rewarded by staff and highlighted in whole-school assemblies to which their parents are invited.

Quality of provision

Senior leaders monitor teaching and learning well and helpful advice is given to staff about how to improve their practice. The good teaching and learning practice in the school is also shared through staff meetings and through a system of peer mentoring. This effective support and challenge has led to an improvement in teaching since the last monitoring inspection. Teaching was at least satisfactory in all the lessons seen and a higher percentage of teaching was good. Teachers plan lessons well around clear learning outcomes that are routinely shared with pupils. Teachers and pupils develop the success criteria for lessons together so that pupils are clear about the criteria against which their work will be judged. Staff and pupils have positive relationships and the behaviour of pupils with emotional and social difficulties is managed well. In the best lessons staff are energetic and enthusiastic and pupils are actively engaged in interesting activities that proceed at a good pace. However, in some lessons staff talk for too long and as a result the pace of learning is satisfactory. In these lessons activities are not always suitably challenging for all pupils in the class.

Marking continues to provide pupils with clear advice about how to improve their work. The marking of pupils' writing is particularly effective.

Senior leaders have ensured that effective safeguarding procedures are in place. These include risk assessments of the premises and equipment, an up-to-date policy on child protection, regular fire evacuation drills and a record of checks made on adults working in the school. Equality for all pupils and the promotion of diversity are given high priority by the school. Staff provide effective support for the most vulnerable, which helps them to settle quickly into the school's friendly, caring and safe environment. Intervention programmes are put in place to help them improve their academic work and pastoral support includes counselling, play therapy and access to a community nurse. Healthy living is promoted through many aspects of

the school's work. Pupils are offered healthy breakfasts and lunches and encouraged to take exercise daily through 'wake up shake up' sessions and through daily outdoor play. Pupils are given professional guidance on road safety from the fire service, and the community police officer provides guidance on personal safety and how to deal with bullying and harassment.

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

- Further improve the progress made by pupils by increasing the percentage of lessons that are good or better – good.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides a clear sense of direction for the school that is focused on raising achievement, improving teaching and learning and promoting the importance of success for all pupils. He is well supported by the deputy headteacher. Systems of monitoring and evaluation are robust and senior leaders are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The raising achievement plan has recently been updated and it addresses the school's areas in need of improvement well, including those issues raised by the last monitoring inspection. Although an annual cycle of monitoring and evaluation has been established, a written summary that makes clear judgements about the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils is not currently in place. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader is committed to improving the provision and has drawn up a good one-year development plan. The English and mathematics leaders are developing their roles well. Through monitoring pupils' work and lessons they have identified key areas for development, such as the need for a greater consistency in the application of the school's calculation policy. Both subject leaders have written action plans to address identified areas in need of improvement.

Governors continue to support the school well, although they recognise there is a need to further develop the level of constructive challenge they provide to the school's leadership team. Governors have now ensured that all statutory policies are in place.

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

- Ensure that all statutory policies are fully in place – satisfactory progress.

External support

The local authority effectively monitors the impact and implementation of the raising achievement plan. A good range of support has been provided to the school since the last inspection. This has included support for assessment, teaching and learning

and leadership and management. The school improvement leader continues to provide the school with effective support and challenge.

Main Judgements

The school's overall progress is good.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to raise standards by ensuring all lessons contain engaging activities that actively involve pupils in learning, are delivered at a good pace and provide challenge for all pupils.
- Create a written, evaluative summary that makes clear judgements about the quality of provision and outcomes for pupils.

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