

Suite 22 West Lancs
Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566930
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email: gtunncliffe@cfbt.com



24 September 2010

Mrs Jane Tomlinson
Headteacher
Underwood West Primary School
Newcastle Street
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 3LF

Dear Mrs Tomlinson

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of
Underwood West Primary School

Thank you for the help you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 23 September 2010, for the time you gave to our telephone discussion and for the information you provided before and during the inspection. I am also grateful to your pupils, the deputy headteacher, the literacy and mathematics teams and the Chair of the Governing Body for spending time with me to share their views about the school's progress. In addition, I appreciated the telephone discussion I had with your local authority adviser.

Since the school was inspected in June 2009, there have been significant changes to the teaching staff and almost half are recently appointed. Five new teachers took up positions at the school in September 2010. A small number of teachers, including one of the deputy headteachers, were not present for this inspection owing to sickness or pre-arranged leave.

As a result of the inspection on 24 and 25 June 2009, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement, which are set out in the annex to this letter. Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made inadequate progress in making improvements and inadequate progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Pupils' attainment in English, mathematics and science by the time they leave school remains too low. Worryingly, attainment is also low at the end of Key Stage 1, although there are signs of improvement in 2010 after a steady year-on-year decline in reading, writing and mathematics since 2007. This means that in order to attain just broadly average standards by the time they are 11 years old, pupils will need to make substantial progress in their learning. Currently, their progress is not good

September 2010



enough. This is evident in the school's own records, which point to underachievement throughout Key Stage 2. The result of this underachievement is that in the unvalidated national tests in 2010 about one third of pupils only in Year 6 attained the nationally expected Level 4 in both English and mathematics. In addition, school leaders identified correctly underachievement in the current Year 5 and Year 6 classes. In order to secure the much better rates of progress required to overcome this underachievement, teaching needs to improve to at least good from the satisfactory quality observed at both the June 2009 inspection and this monitoring inspection.

There are a number of reasons why the signs of recovery in pupils' attainment and the rapidly improving achievement reported at the June 2009 inspection were not evident during this visit.

First, there is too much variability in the quality of teaching throughout the school. Leaders' observations do not focus sharply enough on what pupils will learn. Good teaching does exist. An example of such was seen in a Year 2 lesson in which the teacher and her assistant made very clear to pupils what they were to do and checked carefully, through good-quality questioning and prompting, their understanding of what they would learn. In addition, she had identified different ability groups in her class and provided suitable levels of challenge for them. During this lesson, pupils were given opportunities to extend their understanding and put into practice what they had learned through paired and group work, all of which helped to develop their independent learning skills. The result of these features, coupled with the teacher's high expectations, was that pupils made good progress in this lesson to create instructions on how to make sandwiches. These features have not been and are not currently consistent throughout the school, meaning the majority of lessons ensure only satisfactory progress at best. Such satisfactory progress in lessons will not, from pupils' already low starting points, be strong enough to raise attainment.

Second, there is insufficient clarity in leaders' expectations of the impact of actions undertaken, particularly on outcomes for pupils. A number of initiatives are in place to counter past underachievement, for example, nurture groups, additional teaching time in smaller groups for literacy and numeracy, and a stronger focus on assessing pupils in lessons. In addition, there has been a large amount of appropriate support given by the local authority. However, because leaders have not routinely identified the intended impact of such work, they have not been able to demonstrate its success in accelerating pupils' progress. The overarching result of this lack of clarity is that expectations are not high enough. This has led to targets being set which, if met, would lead to relatively higher standards, but only around the floor target level.

Third, there is too much variability in pupils' understanding of their targets and what they need to do to attain them. There was a mixed response from pupils spoken to during this inspection. Some were very clear about what they should do, for example use a range of connectives to improve their writing, and the steps they needed to

take. Others, while they could articulate the target, were vague in understanding what it meant and what they needed to do. Day-to-day targets, such as teachers' marking in books, are variable too. The very best make clear each pupil's success against the intended learning outcome and explain clearly, and in language the pupils can understand, exactly what needs to be improved. Other comments emphasise only the positive, do not provide points for improvement, or are not related to learning outcomes.

Fourth, attendance is low. Leaders can point to some success with pupils who are persistently absent. The school recognises the need to persist in its work to ensure that its pupils are in school and learning.

School leaders are willing and keen for the school to improve. They are, for example, confident that the new additions to teaching staff will lead to rapid improvement. In addition, the minutes of the governing body meetings highlight some robust discussions about pupils' attainment. Nonetheless, leaders have not been able to demonstrate the impact of their actions on rapidly raising pupils' attainment and the areas for improvement identified in the June 2009 inspection remain unresolved.

This inspection has raised very serious concerns. These will be considered by the appropriate Regional Director, Inspection Delivery, who will decide when the school will next be inspected.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2009

- Raise standards and achievement in English, mathematics and science, especially in Key Stage 2.
- Make sure that all Key Stage 2 pupils know their targets and what they need to do to attain them.
- Promote pupils' independent learning skills, especially in Key Stage 2.