

Prospects Learning Services Ltd
132-138 High Street
Bromley
Kent
BR1 1EZ

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

Direct T 020 8313 7760
Direct F 020 8464 3393



14 February 2008

Miss Debra Mansfield
The Headteacher
Millbrook Combined School
Mill End Road
High Wycombe
HP12 4BA

Dear Miss Mansfield

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 6 February 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

As a result of the inspection in May 2007, the school was asked to

- improve teaching and learning in order to raise standards in English, mathematics and science
- improve provision in the Foundation Stage by building on the good practice in the Nursery
- use assessment information to set challenging targets for all pupils and to ensure that work is consistently matched to their needs
- develop the roles of management at all levels in improving teaching and learning and raising achievement.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Since May 2007 there have been significant changes in staffing. Five new teachers have been appointed, including a new Key Stage 1 coordinator. The Key Stage 2 coordinator is also relatively new, having been appointed to the position after the last inspection.

The headteacher has focused strongly on improving the skills of teachers. This focus, underpinned by the sound package of support provided by the local authority and the new appointments made, has resulted in improvements in the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. Teaching is now satisfactory, and the pockets of

good practice noted in the previous report are more widespread. As a result, pupils are now making satisfactory, and sometimes good, gains in their learning in lessons. The improvements in the quality of teaching have resulted in, and are underpinned by, pupils' better behaviour and more positive attitudes towards school. Pupils have noticed the difference in their lessons, and commented that these are now far less boring and are often fun. In the lessons observed, pupils were always well behaved. Teachers relate well to their pupils. They plan carefully and increasingly make links between subjects. These links enable pupils to practise skills learned in one subject when working in another, and help to make learning more relevant.

The school acknowledges that there is still much to do to achieve its target of all teaching being good or better. The realisation of this target is essential, in order to make inroads into the low standards that are the legacy of underachievement in previous years. The impact of continuing low standards was evident in the lessons seen where teaching was often, of necessity, rather directive because pupils lack the skills and confidence to work independently. Teachers are developing their skills in assessing pupils, and are increasingly able to pitch work more securely at suitably challenging levels to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities. However, this practice is not yet consistent. A scrutiny of pupils' work showed that in some lessons, all pupils are given the same tasks to do regardless of ability. In these cases, the work is pitched at the average level for the class. While the less able pupils often receive good quality help in order to keep up, the more able are not challenged enough in these circumstances.

The school's systems for checking on pupils' progress have become embedded since the last inspection, and enable managers to accurately identify the pupils in need of extra help. The school now sets ambitious targets for pupils' attainment; although at this stage the assessments on which the targets are based are not yet accurate enough. Teachers are now held to account for the achievement of their pupils through regular 'pupil progress meetings' with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher.

At an individual level, pupils have targets to achieve in literacy and numeracy, and these are clearly displayed in their exercise books. However, the extent to which teachers focus on pupils' targets varies considerably. In marking pupils' work, for example, targets are sometimes not considered and, in addition, corrections are not used as a tool for improvement. This inconsistency was reflected in pupils' responses when asked about what they need to do to improve their work. In some cases, they could not remember their targets, and in others their interpretation of them was extremely vague.

In the Foundation Stage, there remain inconsistencies in teaching and learning. The children make satisfactory progress overall, but the rates of progress vary significantly between classes. This is to a large extent because of the continued disruption caused by staff absence in one of the Reception classes. In all classes, children have a good choice of activities indoors. However, provision for outdoor learning, particularly for the Reception classes, is not yet good enough. In one of the Reception classes, children do less well in activities that they choose for themselves because there is little discussion about what they might learn while doing these

tasks. In addition, not enough emphasis is placed on developing children's skills in speaking and listening. This is a key weakness, given the high proportion of children in the early stages of learning to communicate in English.

The headteacher and the deputy headteacher continue to provide good leadership. One of their most important successes has been the creation of a good climate for learning throughout the school. They now receive greater support in the drive to improve achievement and standards from the key stage and core subject coordinators. These teachers are becoming increasingly skilled as leaders. They feel that they are beginning to make a difference to the quality of teaching and learning through their support for their colleagues. However, they have yet to monitor the impact of improvements in a systematic way through regular and rigorous checks on pupils' work and lesson observations. At present, these coordinators are not held to account for pupils' achievement in the same way as class teachers.

The support provided by the local authority has been effective in helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The school is working closely with the authority and is fully consulted during the regular meetings at which progress is monitored.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Mike Thompson
Additional Inspector