

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

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

Direct T 01695 566930  
Direct F 01695 729320

5 February 2010

Mrs Gail Howe  
Headteacher  
White Mere Primary School  
Sherburn Way  
Wardley  
Gateshead  
Tyne and Wear  
NE10 8BA

Dear Mrs Howe

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 4 February, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please, too, convey my thanks to the pupils, the chair of governors and the School Improvement Partner for their assistance.

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes in staffing. The headteacher and deputy headteacher at the time of that inspection have left the school. After a period under an acting headteacher, the school now has a new headteacher and a temporary leadership team.

As a result of the inspection in March 2008, the school was asked to:

- challenge the more-able pupils and raise standards, particularly in writing and mathematics
- improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning, particularly in teachers' use of questions
- extend the use of literacy and numeracy across different subjects.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school has made satisfactory progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

Pupils in Key Stage 1 attain levels that are above average, though these are not as high as they were when the school was last inspected. Overall attainment in Year 6 fell in 2008. Although it improved in 2009, it was no better than at the time of the last inspection. Results in English were above average, but pupils' performance in mathematics and science remained broadly average. This represented satisfactory progress for most pupils. However pupils, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, did not make as much progress as they should in mathematics. The school's assessment data indicate an improving picture, but clearly point to continuing underachievement in mathematics. Pupils' writing is good: their handwriting, spelling, and range of vocabulary are impressive, though their use of punctuation is inconsistent. Older pupils can carry out simple mental arithmetic quickly and accurately, but younger pupils do not master the basics, such as number bonds and multiplication tables, soon enough.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They work very well individually and in small groups, with very little need for close supervision. They show high levels of concentration and an obvious keenness to do well. Their behaviour is impeccable. On the whole, they made good progress in the lessons seen, although some were held back when the work was too easy for them.

Able supported by the local authority, the school has worked hard to improve its provision since the last inspection. Teaching is better. In particular, intensive work on teachers' questioning skills has resulted in lessons in which teachers carefully probe and extend pupils' understanding through a series of searching questions. In the best cases the teachers articulate key questions in their planning. For example, in a mathematics lesson, questions such as 'how do you know that?' and 'why do you think that?' were written into the lesson plan. These questions are carefully designed to 'make our brains work,' as one pupil perceptively put it. In the English lessons observed, the work was well matched to the ability of the pupils. In mathematics, however, some work was not challenging enough.

The school's assessment arrangements are more rigorous than at the time of the last inspection. Staff welcome the new system: they are more aware of how well their pupils are doing and what they need to do next. Teachers mark pupils' work thoroughly and give them detailed advice on how to improve their writing. In the best practice, pupils also get subject-specific advice in mathematics. The pupils are aware of how well they are doing and know their personal targets. Recently instituted daily sessions for teachers to provide feedback to pupils on their work are potentially very useful although the time is not always used correctly.

Staff have explored ways of using English and mathematics in different subjects and some good practice has emerged. In history, for example, the use of time connectives was specified in one class as an assessment criterion when pupils were writing chronological accounts. These links depend largely on individual teachers: they are not yet documented as policy or planned systematically throughout the school.

Progress since the last inspection has been patchy because of changes in key staff. For example, different leaders have favoured different mathematics schemes. Nonetheless, the school is well placed to make rapid strides forward. School leaders have an accurate view of its strengths and priorities for development, based on comprehensive monitoring of staff's work. Staff, pupils and governors understand the direction the school is taking and fully support the changes you have introduced. The school has made clear progress with many of the issues identified by the last inspection and now has the determination and specialist expertise to deal with the key remaining weakness: pupils' progress in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Derek Neil  
Her Majesty's Inspector