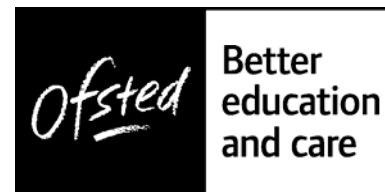


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15 June 2005

Mrs A Jones  
Acting Headteacher  
Birkby Junior School  
Mead Street  
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Huddersfield  
HD1 6HE

Dear Mrs Jones

### **Implementation of Birkby Junior School's Action Plan**

Following the visit of Mrs Sonja Øyen HMI and Mrs Honoree Gordon HMI, to your school on 25 and 26 May 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings which are recorded in the attached note.

The visit was the sixth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the school; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan.

The school has made good progress since the last monitoring inspection and reasonable progress overall since being subject to special measures.

The school is permitted to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Lifelong Learning for Kirklees. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid  
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF BIRKBY JUNIOR SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN**

### Findings of the sixth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures

During the visit 17 lessons or parts of lessons, one registration session and one assembly were inspected. Meetings were held with the acting headteacher, the chair of governors, the deputy headteacher (who will be seconded to the school from the new school year), the co-ordinator for ethnic minority achievement, the learning mentor, the behaviour improvement worker and two representatives from the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the substantive headteacher, the acting headteacher, the chair of the governing body and three representatives from the LEA.

The school's good progress since the last monitoring visit reflects the collective efforts of all the staff and personnel from the LEA. The pace of change has accelerated. Initiatives to support and motivate the pupils, particularly those in Year 6, have proved effective. The atmosphere in school is positive, settled and relaxed; the pupils are noticeably more confident and enthusiastic. They commented that they behave better because they find school much more enjoyable. The work of the learning mentor and the behaviour improvement worker has continued to be highly influential in helping the pupils with behavioural and personal problems to cope with the demands of school life. One pupil has been excluded for a fixed period.

The acting headteacher has been an inspirational leader and a pragmatic manager. She has mentored, supported and encouraged the staff, especially the two newly qualified teachers, while being very clear about what needs to be done. Under her guidance, senior teachers have gained skills and confidence in leading and managing their areas of responsibility and the school ran smoothly during a period when she was absent. The planned programme of handover to the substantive headteacher in July has been well thought out. Similarly, the organisational changes for the new school year reflect good strategic planning in the light of substantial staffing changes and a falling roll.

The stability of staffing and the quality of senior and middle management raise some concerns about the school's development. The acting headteacher, governors and LEA have worked hard to sustain continuity and the quality of teaching. During this monitoring visit, two teachers were absent. Five teachers leave the school at the end of this term due to promotion, retirement and the end of short-term contracts. The governing body has agreed to reduce the number of classes from eleven to ten and to support three teachers who wish to reduce their teaching hours. Following rigorous interviews, the governing body appointed two new teachers, one a fast-track teacher, who will be core subject leaders. The governors have also appointed the seconded education skills teacher to the post of

assistant headteacher. This has been a crucial management appointment. The deputy headteacher submitted her resignation in April and the acting deputy headteacher has gained promotion. To strengthen the management team, the LEA has seconded an experienced deputy headteacher to the school from the start of the autumn term and the acting headteacher will spend one day each week in the school.

This organisational structure is sound and well designed to support the substantive headteacher on her first full term back in post. Nevertheless, there is some uncertainty as the senior managers have not worked together and several other members of staff will be leading subjects and aspects new to them. There is much to do to reconcile roles, responsibilities and ways of working to maintain current areas of good practice and to ensure that the school moves forward on new fronts.

Standards are rising in mathematics and writing. In each year group, a significant proportion of the pupils have made good progress since September, so that more pupils are close to, at or above the level expected for their age. This is more evident in mathematics. The good performance of some pupils, particularly in Years 4 and 5, has stretched the profile of attainment and indicated the potential for standards to rise considerably in the next few years. Nevertheless, there is still a long tail of low attainment in each year group. In Year 3, for example, more than three quarters of the pupils are at least a year behind the expected level in writing. The programme of intervention for the pupils in Year 6 boosted their achievement and prepared them well for taking the national tests. The teachers' cautious assessment of the pupils' attainment indicates the school is on course to improve its results.

The most gains in the pupils' learning have been in the skills of handling numbers, using different strategies to work out number problems, writing for different purposes and using a range of computer software and technological equipment. The lively first edition of the school newspaper, shows how well the older pupils have put these skills into use. The pupils have benefited from daily sessions of reading, but too many read at a superficial level and do not realise the nuances of words and phrases. Although the overall accuracy of spelling and use of punctuation is better, the pupils are still too inconsistent. They frequently misspell common words and omit punctuation. Presentation standards have not improved sufficiently. Very few pupils have flowing, joined handwriting and too many ignore margins and lines.

The improvements in the pupils' learning reflect improvements in the teaching. In all but one of the 17 lessons, the teaching was at least satisfactory. It was very good in three lessons and good in a further seven. This is the strongest profile of teaching to date, with examples of good, confident teaching in all year groups. A common feature in all lessons was the positive, purposeful climate for learning. Lessons were well planned, often in much detail. The teachers managed the pupils very well through praise, awards, questions and changes of activity. The pupils listened attentively and, compared with previous monitoring visits, were much more

responsive when working with a partner or on their own. The teachers have quickly acquired skills in using the interactive whiteboards. The pupils said how much they liked the way they could now see and hear their teachers explain procedures and tasks.

Occasionally, the pace was too slow and the pupils, especially the more able, were not adequately challenged. In some lessons, the pupils completed worksheets, when a practical activity was more fitting. Chances were also missed for the teacher to take the pupils through the steps needed to complete a task. In the most successful lessons, the teachers used every opportunity to discuss, show, review and highlight exactly what the pupils needed to know and do.

The teaching and support staff are increasingly putting into practice the principles of the Intensifying Support Programme, especially in using class targets to guide their work. The regular assessment of the pupils' progress has given the teachers a more reliable basis on which to set realistic targets for the pupils in the long and short term. The teachers explained clearly the purpose of each lesson and in some they shared the *steps to success* so that the pupils knew what counted as good work. This was far less evident in the teachers' marking. In some cases, recent work by the pupils had not been marked and in others, unexplained praise was given for work of a low standard.

The school is making much more effective use of the expertise of the bilingual workers, support teachers and assistants to meet the personal, social and academic needs of the pupils. Those pupils who join the school during the year settle well. Many who have little, or no, English are extremely adept in learning to understand and speak it. In several lessons, the bilingual staff played a crucial role in using the pupils' first language to explain and discuss the content of lessons. Joint planning between the class teachers and staff employed to support the pupils who have English as an additional language has led to a stronger emphasis on active learning for all pupils. Some class teachers are also drawing on their own skills in speaking French and Spanish to support new pupils and to widen the curriculum.

The pupils' behaviour and attitudes continue to improve. In lessons, the pupils wanted to please the adults and they responded well when encouraged to think for themselves, to deduce patterns, to choose methods and to anticipate what might happen next. There were numerous applications for positions on the editorial team of the school newspaper and attendance remains high at clubs.

The acting headteacher has been very successful in setting the school on a strong footing for the new school year. She has fostered good team work and consulted the administrative, teaching and support staff about workplace reform, including the formation of a school change team to ensure everybody has a voice in the changes ahead. Every subject leader now has time to monitor their subject. The more effective reports use supporting evidence to outline the outcomes for pupils.

The chair of the governing body continues to give good support to the school and is well known to all staff and pupils because of his frequent visits. Other governors are being more active in questioning what the school does. They have worked with the LEA on the plans to remodel the school and considered the implications of the falling roll for future staffing and spending.

The LEA has played a significant role in moving the school forward since the last monitoring visit. There have been 29 half-day visits from consultants and the school contact officer to monitor aspects of teaching and learning, to provide support in developing assessment for learning and to advise on the role of the subject leader. The areas for development identified in reports echo those identified by HMI. The LEA's exit strategy and support plan for the next school year set relevant targets for standards and rightly focus on developing further the quality of teaching as well as strengthening leadership and management, especially the school's self evaluation processes. The decision to add the strand of ethnic minority achievement to the Intensifying Support Programme is sensible.

### **Action taken to address the key issues**

#### **Key Issue 1: improve results and the general level of pupils' achievement**

This key issue has been evaluated above. Progress has been reasonable.

#### **Key Issue 2: make teaching more effective across the school**

Progress has been reasonable. The staff have sustained strengths in the quality of their planning and classroom environment and worked to improve other aspects, including effective teamwork and active learning.

#### **Key Issue 3: review and modify the management structure of the school and the roles and responsibilities of teachers who have allowances so that they make an appropriate contribution to the work of the school**

This key issue has largely been evaluated above. There has been good progress at all levels of management, particularly in engendering a shared responsibility for school improvement.

#### **Key Issue 4:**

##### **a) make sure that the teachers and other staff who are employed to support pupils with English as an additional language work consistently to improve the learning of these pupils**

The increased frequency of information in other languages, the focus on key words and the use of the interactive whiteboards reflect the guidance given to all staff in how to support the pupils who have English as an additional language. The

co-ordinator has tracked the progress of the pupils in developing fluency and competence in English and adjusted the level of adult support accordingly. The data shows that the programme of intensive support in Years 5 and 6 has aided improvements in the pupils' language skills. However, as in other year groups, the review does not identify the elements of language that the pupils need in order to progress. The school is aware that too many pupils stall at a particular stage but has not explored fully why this is so and what needs to be done. Overall, the progress has been good.

### **b) improve the provision for pupils who have special educational needs**

Since the last monitoring visit, the co-ordinator for special educational needs has resigned her responsibilities. An audit of existing procedures highlighted several areas where action is needed. The assistant headteacher will take over the leadership of this area from September and has worked with the acting headteacher, class teachers, pupils and parents to review the pupils' progress. The use of "I will..." in the targets has personalised the pupils' individual education plans. Although the teachers are aware of the pupils' needs, their lesson plans rarely include references to them. Overall, progress has been reasonable.

### **Key Issue 5: develop arrangements to find out what pupils know, understand and can do and use this information to help them improve**

The senior management team has recently led an analysis of the pupils' progress with the co-ordinators and teachers. They have identified strengths, possible reasons for the areas for development and suggestions for action. Although there have been some professional development sessions on marking, as part of assessment for learning, this has not yet had an impact on practice. Progress in this key issue has been reasonable.

### **Key Issue 6: help parents to become more involved in their children's education**

The acting headteacher has played a key role in strengthening the school's partnership with the parents. She knows many of them from her leadership of Birkby Infant School and she has gained their support in resolving attendance and behavioural matters. The behaviour improvement worker, the learning mentor and the community development worker also have the trust of the parents and have formed good links with local agencies. As a result, the parents support their children in taking part in a range of activities in and out of school time. Seventy seven per cent of parents came to the open evening in the spring term and the school made provision for others to come at different times. The parents are also supporting school ventures, such as the collection of supermarket vouchers

for extra equipment and the taking of photographs to add to the records of visits made to families abroad. The progress has been good.

### **Key Issue 7: help pupils to develop the spiritual dimension of their personal development**

The good progress made in all aspects of this key issue has had a positive impact on the atmosphere in the school and on the overall quality of what the school offers. There is a clear schedule of themes for school assemblies and the acts of collective worship take the range of faiths in the school into full account. There is a very strong emphasis on raising the pupils' self esteem through the recognition and celebration of achievement, displays of good work, inspirational posters and lessons in personal, social, emotional and health education. The co-ordinator for the gifted and talented has begun to lead sessions on philosophy. The use of the worry box, the circle of friends and the befrienders schemes are now well established. The pupils know their targets and are willing to do their bit. They are excited about the planned restructuring of the accommodation and also keen that the school gains the Healthy School standard.

### **Key Issue 8: improve attendance by vigorously pursuing poor attendance, encouraging parents to realise the adverse effect on their children's education when extended visits are taken**

The progress has been good over time. The school has not reached its target of 96 per cent attendance although some classes have done so. The school continues to monitor punctuality and attendance and to follow up unexplained absences. It has been very successful in reducing the rate of unauthorised absence. The rate of attendance continues to be affected by those pupils absent because their families are away. During this monitoring inspection, five pupils were visiting families in Pakistan.