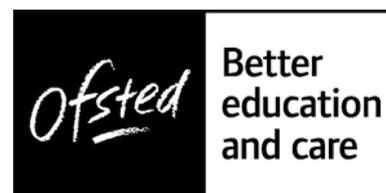


Cambridge Education  
Demeter House  
Station Road  
Cambridge  
CB1 2RS

T 01223 578500  
F 01223 578501  
inspections\_2@camb-ed.com

Ofsted helpline  
0845 640 4045



30 November 2005

The Headteacher  
Milldene Primary School  
Barbrook Lane  
Tiptree  
Colchester  
CO5 0EF

Dear Mr Birtwell

## **SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF MILLDENE PRIMARY SCHOOL**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Ruth Frith, Additional Inspector, to your school on 3 and 4 November 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was found to have serious weaknesses in March 2005.

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

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the coordinators of literacy, science and special educational needs, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from the local authority (LA).

### **Context**

Since the inspection in March, there have been changes in the leadership of the school. The headteacher at the time of the inspection was absent due to ill-health and has not been in school since May. She has resigned with effect from 31 December 2005. The deputy headteacher was acting headteacher during the second half of the summer term. From September 2005, the local authority has provided an interim headteacher from its advisory staff. The interim headteacher

expects to remain in post until he is replaced by a permanent headteacher, but if a need arises in another school, it is possible that the LA will redeploy him. The deputy headteacher has been absent since the beginning of November because of medical treatment. The LA has supplied an interim deputy, although she also was absent during this inspection.

### **Achievement and standards**

The school's results in the 2005 national tests for Year 6 pupils showed a distinct improvement from the previous year and halted the steady decline in test results from 2000 to 2004. The results were broadly in line with the national figures. The pupils made satisfactory progress in relation to their starting points.

Test results were better in mathematics and science than in English. Boys did significantly less well than girls in English and most pupils underperformed in writing. Very few pupils achieved the higher Level 5 in writing. Boys' results were above average in mathematics and science, but no girls achieved a Level 5 in mathematics. The school's targets provided a satisfactory degree of challenge and all were met except the target for the number of pupils achieving Level 5 in English.

Year 2 test results were similar to those of 2004 and were broadly average. This represents a gradual improvement since 2003.

The standard of work seen in lessons was consistent with the 2005 results and indicates that pupils' progress is satisfactory. Writing is less well developed than other literacy skills. The school has taken steps to improve pupils' presentation of their work but has not yet achieved a culture of good presentation. Higher attaining pupils do less well in writing than they should. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported and make satisfactory progress. Teachers' planning has been improved to include work for pupils of different levels of ability. This is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress. Pupils in the Reception class enjoy school and develop good attitudes to learning because they are well taught.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2005:

- raise standards of attainment in English, mathematics and science in Years 3-6 – satisfactory progress.

### **Personal development and well-being**

Since the inspection, the school has continued to develop its work in this area and pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They enjoy learning and speak confidently about what they have achieved. Older pupils say that lessons have been made more interesting since the inspection and younger pupils speak about the fun they have in lessons. Relationships are good and result in a friendly learning environment in which children feel confident and happy. Pupils make good progress in developing their responsibility, cooperation and initiative. They arrive at school keen to start the day and attendance continues to be well above the national average.

Pupils' moral and social development is good. They behave well as a result of clear procedures and develop respect for each other and the school. They have a good understanding of how to achieve a healthy lifestyle. This is supported by two physical education lessons each week, after-school activities and the team points that are awarded for eating healthy food. Pupils follow routines well and act sensibly and safely in school. Through responsibilities as Year 6 play leaders or on the school council, they become aware of how they can help others in school and the wider community. They develop satisfactory literacy, numeracy and ICT skills that contribute positively to their future economic well-being.

### **Quality of provision**

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Nine lessons were observed, of which five were good and four satisfactory. This reflects the school's view of teaching and broadly matches its target for improved teaching. There is more good teaching than at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils are keenly aware of this. They enjoy lessons more because they have more interesting work to do.

Teachers have responded well to direction from the school and from LA advisers. They have worked together to identify the key characteristics of a good lesson and consistently try to make use of these. Most lessons are carefully planned to match pupils' abilities. Pupils are informed about the lesson's objectives and teachers use a range of methods to engage pupils actively in learning. In most lessons, teachers effectively review with pupils what they have learned at the end of the lesson. Teachers are enthusiastic to implement new methods, but some are less skilled than others in how they do this.

Where teaching is good, teachers are clear about what they want pupils to learn and share this with them. Teaching methods are used skilfully to enable pupils to work independently or with others and to contribute their own ideas. Resources, including computers and interactive whiteboards, are used well to stimulate pupils' interest. Teachers maintain a good pace by setting clear deadlines. Pupils of all abilities are well challenged. The expertise of specialist staff is also used well in, for example, music and ICT.

Where teaching is less effective, pupils are not sufficiently clear about what they are expected to learn from their activities. In some lessons, the pace was rather slow, while in others pupils moved too quickly from one activity to another before consolidating their learning. In a few lessons, the work was not well matched to the needs of the most able or least able pupils.

There have been many improvements in assessment and target setting, although these are not yet fully consolidated. All pupils have targets for what they should do to improve their work and for the level they can achieve. They find these helpful in focusing their efforts. The school has recently introduced a good framework for assessing pupil's attainment at the end of each term and tracking their progress in relation to what is expected for their age. Teachers' focus on pupils' achievement has been increased because the headteacher regularly meets each teacher to

discuss the progress made by each pupil in their class. Teachers are expected to consider pupils' prior attainment when planning lessons and to review this afterwards. These developments have improved the quality of teaching, but all teachers are not yet fully confident in using them to track and support pupils' progress. Pupils' work is marked regularly, but the quality of marking is not consistently good and varies between classes. Teachers write constructive comments, but in some cases these do not relate sufficiently to the learning objective that pupils have written down in the lesson. In addition, pupils do not always follow up the guidance they are given.

Opportunities to promote literacy and numeracy in all subjects have been identified, although not all teachers make full use of these. Teachers' planning has been improved to achieve a better balance in the time spent on different subjects, although there is still some variation in this. The good provision for pupils with special educational needs has been maintained.

The level of care for the pupils is good. Staff are supportive and sensitive to pupils' needs. As a result, pupils feel safe and are keen to learn. Parents' comments are positive and confirm that children enjoy school and are keen to attend. Recent developments in target setting have given pupils a clearer idea of what is expected of them and what they need to do to improve.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2005:

- improve the quality of teaching – satisfactory progress
- make more constructive use of assessment to set targets for subsequent learning – good progress.

## **Leadership and management**

Leadership and management have improved and are satisfactory. The school has a clear focus on raising pupils' achievement. Some improvements in leadership and management took place in the months after the previous inspection, although progress was hampered by uncertainties about the substantive leadership of the school. The school's action plan is satisfactory. It provides a clear programme for improvement. It includes criteria against which to measure progress, but there are not enough target dates by when they should be achieved.

Since his appointment in September, the interim headteacher has provided good leadership. He has quickly gained the confidence of staff and pupils. He has provided staff with clear guidance on improving their roles and responsibilities. Through regular individual meetings and through taking an interest in their work, he has provided teachers with good support and has made them more accountable for the impact of their work. Staff have responded well and are keen to improve their own professional skills and the performance of the school. They are well motivated and growing in confidence.

The school's self evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is satisfactory. The headteacher has an accurate knowledge of the quality of teaching because he regularly observes lessons and monitors teachers' planning. The school consults pupils and parents and responds to their views through the school council and a representative group of parents. Thorough procedures are being established to assess and track pupils' progress. Subject coordinators analyse test results to make improvements to the curriculum, but at present the school does not use assessment data sufficiently to evaluate the progress made by different groups of pupils. There is a comprehensive programme for monitoring and evaluation, although this is at an early stage of implementation.

The subject coordinators provide satisfactory leadership and management. Subject leadership has been strengthened because the whole-school management processes have been improved. Subject coordinators have clear guidance for monitoring the work of their subject and planning improvements. At present, however, there is still some variation in how well different class teachers implement the curriculum and teach each subject.

Governance has improved and is satisfactory. The governing body has a full complement of members. Governors have worked hard to improve the effectiveness of their role and to hold the school to account. They have been closely involved in preparing the school's action plan. Governors are each linked to one of the key areas for improvement and to a subject. A schedule has recently been implemented for governors to visit the school and report back. Some of these visits have taken place.

Many of the improvements in teaching, assessment and management have not yet had a full impact on ensuring that pupils make consistently good progress. However, the improvements that are evident in pupils' morale and progress, the quality of teaching and assessment, and the use that staff are making of new management processes show that the school has the capacity to improve further. The school has good structures in place to support further improvement and many of these have been introduced by the interim headteacher.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2005:

- ensure that leadership by the headteacher, senior management team and governors is more rigorous in moving the school forward – satisfactory progress
- make monitoring of subjects by coordinators more rigorous to impact on teaching and learning, standards and achievement – **satisfactory progress.**

### **External support**

The school has received good support from the LA. Following the inspection, the LA supported the school well in writing its action plan. The LA's statement of action is satisfactory. It is based on an accurate assessment of the school's needs and provides a well planned programme of support. It includes criteria for measuring

progress in implementing the programme, but some of these lack precision. The school's link adviser regularly visits the school and has had a significant input into improving teaching and the accuracy of teachers' assessments. LA consultants provide effective support in subject expertise. Following the resignation of the headteacher, the LA has supported the school by providing an effective interim headteacher and, more recently, an interim deputy headteacher. An officer from the governor support team attends governors' meetings and provides them with good support and feedback on their role.

### **Main Judgements**

The school has made satisfactory progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Raise standards in English in Years 3 to 6, particularly writing, and ensure that pupils reach the higher levels in national tests.
- Increase teachers' ability to make effective use of a wide range of teaching methods that engage pupils fully in their learning.
- Increase teachers' confidence with assessment methods so that they make full use of them to track and support pupils' progress.
- Ensure that the programme for monitoring and evaluation is fully implemented and that the outcomes are used to improve consistency in the quality of provision.
- Ensure that the school continues to benefit from strong, clear leadership.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Essex County Council.

Yours sincerely

John Godwood

**Additional Inspector**