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Mrs C Lockwood  
The Headteacher  
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1 November 2005

Dear Mrs Lockwood

## UNDERACHIEVING SCHOOLS: MONITORING INSPECTION OF FREDERICK BIRD PRIMARY SCHOOL

### Introduction

Following my visit with Fran Gillam, additional inspector, to your school on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> October 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 identified as underachieving in June 2004.

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

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, senior management team, groups of pupils, the chair and vice chair of governors, a representative from the local education authority and staff.

### Context

The context of the school presents staff with many difficulties in raising standards quickly. This is because mobility levels are high and the high percentage of pupils entering or leaving the school at different times of the year depresses national test results. The school serves a disadvantaged inner city community. It has a very high number of pupils entitled to free school meals as well as a high percentage of pupils who have learning difficulties, many of whom experience emotional and behavioural

problems. A high percentage of pupils have English as an additional language and many pupils enter the school not speaking English. The school caters for an increasing number of pupils who are refugees from Somalia. The main ethnic groups of pupils within the school are White British, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black African. There are 46 different languages spoken in the school. Since its last inspection in 2004 there has been a very high staff turnover with 11 staff leaving. Six new staff have been appointed, four of whom are newly qualified. There has also been a lot of staff absence caused by illness. For over a year the school has had extensive building work which has caused disruption to learning because some pupils have had to move classrooms several times. The school now has a full complement of staff, the building work has ceased, and disruptions have been minimised.

### Achievement and standards

In spite of the challenges the school faces the pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall, although there is still some underperformance in particular year groups. The school is soundly placed to raise standards further and its capacity to improve is satisfactory. However, standards are very low. There are modest improvements in the standards attained by the pupils in reading and writing at the end of Key Stage 1 and in science at the end of both Key Stages 1 and 2 in 2005. The proportion of the pupils achieving the expected Level 4 or above in the end of Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests increased by 33% in 2005 and standards are now well below average rather than very low. In English the results fell due to the slower progress of some pupils as a result of weak teaching in the past. Also, there is a much higher than average number of pupils moving into the infants and juniors other than at the normal starting time. The school's analysis of data shows that the performance of this transient population lowers standards at the end of Years 2 and 6 in English and mathematics. There is effective support for these pupils through, for example, the programmes to support English language acquisition and to settle pupils quickly into their new classes. The progress of these groups of pupils is generally satisfactory.

The rate of pupils' progress in lessons is generally satisfactory. This is an improvement since the last inspection. There is still some underachievement in English, mathematics and science, especially amongst average ability pupils. The robust systems in place now clearly identify groups and individuals who may be at risk of underachieving. As a result, support for these pupils is well focused, poor attendance is vigorously challenged, and teachers are clearly aware of where to pitch work to ensure that pupils build more effectively on what they have done before. However, this positive work is not yet reflected in the standards attained in national tests. Higher attaining pupils are making good progress and nearly all the pupils who attained average standards at the end of Year 2 attained above average standards in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6 this summer.

In over a third of lessons observed pupils' progress was good. This was as a result of pupils' enjoyment in what they were learning, the good match of work to pupils' abilities, and improved teaching. The emphasis on developing pupils' skills in solving scientific and mathematical problems is proving successful because pupils are

interested in what they are doing and work hard as a result. Whilst standards in these lessons were still below those expected for the pupils' ages, the challenge in the tasks encouraged pupils to do their best.

Attainment on entry to the Nursery has declined and is now very low. While children in the Nursery and Reception make good gains in learning due to the good provision and teaching, only a third of children attain the expected standards for their ages in communication, language and literacy, and mathematical development. Children make very good progress in developing their personal and emotional skills and the majority attain the expected standards by the end of the Reception year. On entry to Year 1 attainment is well below that expected nationally. Already this term the school has admitted 14 pupils who have no English at all.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2004:

- raise standards and achievement in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory progress.

#### Personal development and well-being

Provision for pupils' personal development and well-being is good and improving. The school has worked very hard at developing behaviour management strategies and three learning mentors are making a significant contribution to improving behaviour. Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are good. The school effectively reduced the number of exclusions to 25 in the summer term and this term there have been none.

The school is an orderly community. Pupils are polite and know the difference between right and wrong. All staff consistently apply a good range of behaviour management strategies and, as a result, pupils know what is expected of them. Occasionally attitudes deteriorate when pupils are not sufficiently challenged such as in Year 1 where, in two of the classes, teaching does not sufficiently move pupils on at a fast enough rate.

The systems to monitor attendance and the action taken from the analysis of the information are good. As a result the number of pupils whose attendance and punctuality cause concern is dropping. However, a small number of families still persists in taking their children on extended holidays in term time which adversely affects attendance. The rate of attendance is below average but has improved since the last inspection and exceeded the target set for 2004–2005 by the local education authority. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles through the good range of extracurricular activities which are addressed through Top Play and multi-sports. These activities include netball and basketball club. Pupils are developing skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being by working well in groups, using information and communication technology appropriately, and engaging in lively debate in lessons.

There were no areas for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2004. However, attendance is improving and behaviour and pupils' attitudes are now good.

## Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with examples of good and very good practice especially in Year 2 and Year 6. Nineteen lessons or parts of lessons were seen of which nearly half were good. A small percentage of unsatisfactory teaching was seen in Year 1 where pupils were not sufficiently challenged especially in writing. Pupils are eager to learn, they know what they have to do to improve, and the monitoring of teaching and learning by senior management is good. As yet, not all teachers have the opportunity to see the best practice in the school, although plans are in place for this to happen. The use of interactive whiteboards in lessons is good and keeps pupils focused on learning. Support staff are used well to help pupils engage in learning, especially with small groups who need additional help in reading, writing and number work. Teachers' marking is thorough and much improved since the last inspection of 2004 and gives pupils good quality information as to how they might improve their work. The use of assessment in teaching is now satisfactory. Teachers are now fully aware of the pupils they need to target. Teachers know that there is still work to be done with average attaining pupils to move them on at a faster rate. There is evidence in teachers' planning that this is being addressed but, as yet, this is not reflected in the end of Year 2 and Year 6 test results. Evidence in pupils' books and teachers' planning clearly shows that underachievement is being tackled appropriately through more focused teaching and rigorous use of assessment. However, pupils are not given enough opportunities to write, especially in Year 1. Whilst good opportunities are given to pupils to discuss their learning through the use of talking partners, insufficient opportunities are provided in lessons for pupils to record their findings and this slows down their rate of progress in writing.

The curriculum is vibrant and exciting. Pupils have plenty of opportunities to learn through the arts. Boys attend a boys' dance club during school which they thoroughly enjoy. However, teachers' planning shows that, as yet, too few opportunities are identified to develop writing opportunities across the curriculum.

The quality of care and guidance for pupils is good. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties, are included in all aspects of school life and the inclusion manager ensures that every child gets his or her full entitlement. Pupils interviewed said that all teachers look after them well, they can always ask for help and are confident that it will be given to them. All staff know their pupils well and support staff make a valid contribution to pupils' learning because they are well managed.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2004:

- increase the amount of good and very good teaching – satisfactory progress
- make better use of assessment data to set individual targets for improvement so that work is appropriately matched to the widely varying learning needs of pupils – satisfactory progress.

## Leadership and management

In spite of the very low standards that pupils are presently attaining, there is good leadership and management of the school, with examples of very good practice in the senior management team. The headteacher is determined and focused on removing underachievement. She is very ably supported by the senior management team who clearly know what to do in order to raise standards. The team are dynamic in their approach to raising standards and have been instrumental in gathering robust data on underachievement. Together with the headteacher and support of the local education authority, they have set up rigorous systems and have been very successful in holding staff accountable for the standards that pupils attain. For example, staff are expected to report on pupils' progress every six weeks and appropriate steps are then taken to ensure that staff are trained to improve aspects of their teaching. The good systems of performance management are helping staff to focus on raising standards.

The school's work is guided by a well focused school improvement plan, which is regularly evaluated by the headteacher, senior managers, governing body and local education authority advisor. Governors are kept fully informed and this enables them to have a clear picture of what has, and has not, worked in raising standards. The governing body carries out its duties effectively and all governors are very supportive of the headteacher's and senior managers' work in raising standards. Subject leaders have been trained in their roles and, as a result, they are held accountable by reporting to governors on standards, teaching and learning in their subjects. The school has recently spent a significant amount of money on improving the quality of resources in an attempt to raise standards further. Subject leaders have not, as yet, reported to governors on the effectiveness of these resources in raising standards.

The accommodation is very good and a very pleasant learning environment has been created. Noise levels have been reduced and there is plenty of room for quiet group work and reflective study. This is having a positive effect on teaching and learning, pupils' attitudes to learning, and behaviour.

The school has received intensive support from the local education authority. It is now well placed to rely less on the local education authority's interventions because it has accurate self-evaluation in place. The school's capacity to improve is now satisfactory. This is due to stability in staffing, vastly improved accommodation, and improvements in the use of assessment and monitoring of underachievement, the quality of teaching and learning, and the accountability of staff in relation to standards that pupils attain. This has all been brought about by the effective leadership and management of the headteacher and the good quality of support from the local education authority.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in June 2004:

- improve the accommodation – good progress.

## External support

The local education authority's statement of action is satisfactory with good features. For example, the plan shows close alignment with the school's action plan, very clear focus on raising standards, carefully targeted support and regular evaluation of standards. The local education authority has provided a good range of support such as taking the school through the Intensified Support and the Primary Leadership Programmes. The school improvement advisor has a very clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and targeted support is offered by the local education authority's literacy and numeracy consultants. This has helped to improve the quality of teaching in literacy and numeracy.

## Main judgements

The school has made satisfactory progress in dealing with the causes of underachievement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Coventry.

Yours sincerely

Bogusia Matusiak-Varley  
Additional Inspector