

20 April 2006

Mrs E Corner
Burnham Market Primary School
Friar's Lane
Burnham Market
Kings Lynn
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PE31 8JA

Dear Mrs Corner

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BURNHAM MARKET PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Paul Brooker HMI to your school on 22 and 23 March 2006, 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 became subject to special measures in September 2005.

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.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, all teachers, the chair and vice chair of governors and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

The substantive headteacher has resigned. An acting headteacher has been appointed by the governing body pending the appointment of a new headteacher. The LA has allocated a school improvement teacher to work in the school. The senior teacher who teaches the Reception and Year 1 class has been absent for most of the spring term. During the visit this class was being taught by another LA school improvement teacher.

Achievement and standards

The latest PANDA report for 2005 confirms that standards were significantly below expected levels in Year 2. Boys' standards were much lower than girls' and younger children in the year group did less well. Results at the end of Key Stage 1 have been consistently below national levels since 2002. Standards in Year 6 have remained broadly in line with the national average, but in 2005 the proportion of children achieving the higher level 5 in English and mathematics was low. Results in science were above average and these have boosted the overall results. In 2005, girls did better than boys but the gap was narrower than in Year 2. The school has set suitably challenging targets for children in Years 2 and 6.

Children enter school with skills that are broadly average. The school's own initial assessments confirm this. The Foundation Stage profile results for 2005 were not reliably recorded and there is currently little available assessment information for children in Reception. This makes it difficult for the school to judge progress from the beginning of the year. In the lessons observed during the visit, progress for children in Reception was very good. However, the temporary arrangements and the long term absence of the class teacher make children's future good progress less certain. Progress in the Year 1/2 class is satisfactory but variable. The assessments made of children's progress indicate that standards are improving but are still below expected levels overall. In Key Stage 2 children make satisfactory and sometimes good progress, particularly in the older class. Consistently good teaching is needed for children in Years 2 and 6 if they are to meet their challenging targets in 2006.

A more systematic approach is now in place for tracking children's achievement in reading, writing and mathematics as they move through the school. Teachers can now have a better understanding of the progress that children make and are able to set targets for their further improvement. The headteacher, subject leaders and special educational needs coordinator are in a position to identify any individual or groups of children who are not making the progress expected. An initial analysis of the data has enabled the school to introduce specific programmes to support targeted children, particularly in Years 2, 3 and 6. These are used to boost attainment and help those children who need to catch up. Much of the intervention work has only just begun and it is too early to judge its impact. Although these actions will benefit all children, little has been done specifically to help teachers gain a better understanding of the wider approaches to tackling boys' underachievement.

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

- Improve standards, particularly in respect to boys' attainment in Key Stage 1 – satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Personal development and well-being are good. The school provides a calm and positive environment for learning. Relationships between children and between adults and children are very good. Around the school children are friendly and show consideration for others. Their behaviour is very good and most have very positive attitudes to learning; attitudes and behaviour were at least satisfactory in all lessons, and mostly good or outstanding. In general, the children enjoy their learning; they showed genuine interest in the woodcarving of the visiting speaker. In lessons, children followed instructions, were keen to participate and often worked with energy and enthusiasm. They retained their concentration well and were patient in waiting their turn, but some, particularly younger children, became restless when the pace of learning was too pedestrian and teaching had too few strategies to engage them.

The school has taken clear steps to develop a more positive culture and ethos. Rewards are better used to encourage good achievement; children's efforts and achievements are routinely recognised and celebrated; and they are encouraged to take more responsibility for improving their school. The school council has been given a higher profile. The councillors have suggested and discussed a range of improvements, some of which have already been introduced.

The school monitors attendance closely and has tightened procedures for tracking and following-up absences. However, attendance, at 91.5%, remains below the national average and below the school target. The issue of lateness has been successfully tackled.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has strengthened since the last inspection and is satisfactory overall. In the lessons observed the quality of learning ranged from outstanding to inadequate. The children generally make at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress in lessons. The school's own monitoring indicates that teaching is at least satisfactory and mostly good.

In general, relationships are good and work is well managed and directed. Lessons are guided by learning objectives that are shared with children so that they understand what to do and what they should achieve. Teaching makes better use of targets, for example in writing and mathematics, to guide children's progress. Marking is satisfactory, but does not always guide precisely how children can make the next step in their learning. Some routines, such as the use of mini white-boards, are effective in ensuring that all children are engaged in learning, and that their understanding is assessed.

In the best lessons challenging work was very well matched to children's abilities and was skilfully managed. Carefully planned activities enabled children to develop a good understanding of their new learning and encouraged them to be independent. In these lessons teaching assistants were well used in order to sustain a brisk pace and to present a consistent level of challenge. The best teaching built well on what children had done previously. In these lessons work was well paced with a suitable balance of teacher input and independent activities, and children's understanding was skilfully assessed and promoted through targeted questioning and well considered plenary sessions. The recently introduced catch-up sessions for targeted Year 3 children have been well focused on raising their attainment. Weaker teaching was less well planned, because it attended less precisely to subject learning objectives, and was slower in pace.

Half-termly training sessions have been organised for teaching assistants. Their roles have been clarified and strengthened, although the use of their time and the quality of their support varies. Support for individuals and small groups is often very good, but in some lessons teaching assistants tend to lead rather than guide children's learning and their roles during whole class teaching are not always sufficiently well planned.

Since the last inspection, significant improvements have been made to the school's resources, for example for reading, and also to the learning environment. In addition, the programme of enrichment has been considerably extended and involves a majority of children in a range of extra curricular activities and clubs. The school continues to care well for its children. Improvements have been made in the use of assessment data to strengthen guidance and support. Children's attainment and progress is more systematically monitored and the school is in a much stronger position to provide targeted learning activities to help children catch up when they fall behind.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the acting headteacher are very good. She has introduced a culture of high expectations and quickly built a collective determination to improve the quality of provision. She has established effective systems and procedures by which to begin to monitor the work of the school and guide its future improvement. A school improvement plan has been drawn up to match the priorities identified in the inspection; although this could be aligned more precisely to the local authority's support plan. The headteacher has brought about a rapid and significant improvement in the working and learning environment. This has boosted staff morale and everyone is now working together to bring about improvements. A new school prospectus has

been written during this term, and communication with parents and governors is now secure and much more informative. The headteacher is systematically reviewing the school's self evaluation (SEF) and is engaging all staff in a more accurate evaluation of the school's effectiveness.

Improvements in monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are underway. A schedule has been drawn up to timetable the review of the school's curriculum and other policies. The headteacher has completed some lesson observations and provided feedback on strengths and points for development in teaching. Staff feel that the feedback provided has been helpful and constructive in improving the quality of their teaching. The monitoring records give a good account of what happened in the lessons but could be more sharply focussed on the quality and pace of learning, particularly in aspects which require improvement. The role of the subject leaders in monitoring, evaluating and guiding improvements in subjects remains underdeveloped. There are plans for subject leaders to monitor systematically teaching and learning through a programme of lesson observations, evaluating planning and completing work scrutinies. A start has been made by the subject leader for English and a good quality action plan has been written for the improvement of provision in information and communication technology (ICT). However, the absence of the mathematics subject leader has slowed down the speed of improvement in this area of the curriculum.

Governance has strengthened. Governors are better informed and are taking a more active role in monitoring the work of the school. For example, through governor visits which are recorded and follow an agreed protocol. The governing body is becoming more aware of its role in the school. There is a shared commitment to bringing about improvement through a greater understanding of the challenges faced and recognition of the steps that need to be taken. The governing body action plan clearly lays out the actions and training governors will undertake to become more effective.

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

- Improve leadership and management so that the staff are supported and involved more effectively in the development of the school – good progress.
- Establish effective monitoring procedures throughout the school so that good practice can be shared and appropriate help given where needed – satisfactory progress.

External support

The staff and governors value the support they have received from the LA. The authority's statement of action is detailed and gives a clear indication of the level of support the school can expect. A project board has been established to oversee the support programme and to monitor and evaluate improvements. The additional staffing provided by the LA has had a positive impact on helping the headteacher to secure improvements. Monitoring visits have been completed by inspectors and advisers and detailed reports are written on progress since the inspection. The authority considers that its support plan will enable the school to "no longer require special measures" by the autumn term 2006. This is suitably ambitious.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Quality of LA's statement of action – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to develop the leadership and management roles of key staff.
- Continue to strengthen the quality of teaching in all classes to enable all children to make good progress in all subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Rob McKeown
H M Inspector