



9 March 2006

Mrs Belinda Lithgow
The Headteacher
Tower Bridge Primary School
Fair Street
Tower Bridge Road
London
SE1 2AE

Dear Mrs Lithgow

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF TOWER BRIDGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Sheila Nolan AI to your school on 23 and 24 February 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 October 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 headteacher, members of staff, pupils, representatives of the governing body and of the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the inspection, three members of senior staff, including the deputy head teacher, have left the school. The school is actively recruiting a new deputy head teacher and two new team leaders.

Achievement and standards

The previous report evaluated standards across the school as inadequate. The school's tracking of pupil progress confirms the findings from this monitoring inspection that, in Years 3 to 6, the pupils' rate of progress remains too slow for all groups of pupils. This includes able pupils, those with learning difficulties and those for whom English is an additional language. In lessons, standards are generally well below average. The pupils' achievement in English, mathematics and science is amongst that of the very lowest performing schools nationally. In contrast, pupils in the nursery and reception class make good progress from a well below average start. Their personal, social and emotional development is particularly rapid.

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

- Improve standards and the rate of progress made by pupils in Key Stage 2 – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

The school has maintained the calm ethos noted at the time of the last inspection. Working relationships are warm and almost all pupils co-operate well. There have been no permanent exclusions and only one recent fixed-term exclusion. Pupils clearly enjoy school and feel secure. Nevertheless, they remain reticent about shouldering responsibilities, and how they might contribute to the school's push to improve further, often showing a lack of urgency to learn.

Attendance figures for the last full term have improved on the same period last year although they remain below the national figures for primary schools. Seasonal illnesses caused a lower rate of attendance than the near-average figures recorded for the whole of the previous academic year. Robust measures by the home-school liaison officer, in conjunction with the education welfare service, account for much of this improvement. However, Year 6 pupils attend notably less well than other year groups. Punctuality has also improved although there remains a small number of persistent latecomers.

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

- Reduce the high levels of unauthorised absence and improve punctuality – good.

Quality of provision

Despite some hard work, little progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 since the last inspection. Half of the lessons seen in Years 3 to 6 were inadequate. Medium and short-term planning has improved but there is no common lesson planning format that supports teachers' planning of individual lessons, many of which are not well enough structured. As a result, the pace of lessons is often too slow.

Most lessons benefit from the high number of classroom assistants. These roles have been better developed so that some support staff clearly understand how best to support both teachers and pupils. Nevertheless, often this valuable assistance is not well enough targeted to help achieve specific enough learning objectives for particular pupils. In some lessons, teaching assistants are inactive for long periods when pupils are sitting listening. This happens partly because, as at the time of the last inspection, in far too many lessons pupils continue to spend too long listening or working on one task with little practical activity. When their concentration wanes, their progress slows, and they become restless and bored. Poor presentation and writing characterise children's work in such lessons. Planned work does not challenge able pupils sufficiently nor match adequately the needs of many of those with learning difficulties or at the early stages of learning English. Too few teachers make precise learning outcomes, or targets, clear to the pupils so that they can evaluate together how much pupils have learned and how they can improve. The quality of marking, and verbal feedback to pupils, is inconsistent and does not provide enough guidance. Pupils rarely follow up errors or make their work better.

The curriculum meets requirements. The school has rightly placed a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy and drawing on and celebrating the varied ethnic backgrounds of the pupils. In all subjects, except literacy and numeracy, subject co-ordinators have begun to map common themes across the curriculum, including the use of information and communication technology (ICT). Nevertheless, despite these improvements, areas of weakness remain. The music curriculum at Key Stage 2 is stimulating but lacks sufficient breadth, for example, and, despite good intentions, little systematic use is made of the wonderful local resources in the immediate

vicinity of the school. The morning registration time is not well used in all classes and makes for a rather dawdling start to the school day. There are also few opportunities for pupils to contribute their ideas about what they like and how the school could be further improved.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in KS2 – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The head teacher provides caring leadership which ensures that the school runs smoothly and that pupils feel well looked after. Since the inspection, she and her staff have worked to keep the school on track, despite the changes in the senior leadership. Curriculum leaders work hard to promote their subjects, providing helpful advice to colleagues, and are beginning to understand how they are accountable. However, their understanding of standards and the quality of teaching is not always secure.

The school has made a start on developing its self-evaluation systems but there remains much more to do. The head teacher has improved assessment procedures and pupils' progress is tracked accurately. Although teachers are now more aware of the importance of this data, it is used poorly in classes to meet pupils' individual needs. The school management has not explained clearly enough what is expected in this area. All teachers are now observed regularly by the head teacher, subject leaders, and LA staff. This provides some helpful information about the quality of teaching. However, the observations tend to focus on what adults do in lessons, rather than how well pupils learn, so the school does not gain sufficient evidence about how well its monitoring programme is improving learning or standards. Nor has the information gained been distilled to provide a clear view of overall strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. This is reflected, too, in the school improvement plan, which does not identify which aspects of teaching need to be improved across the school to raise standards systematically, or how this will be achieved. All these systems lack coherence and thoroughness, so they make only modest impact. The school, therefore, continues to show insufficient capacity to improve in the most important areas.

There is currently no full-time special needs co-ordinator (SENCO) so the head teacher is acting in the role. She is supported well by an experienced SENCO for one day a fortnight but overall this arrangement is not sufficiently effective as not enough time is available. Some initial management steps

have been taken to try to improve the provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) but the impact of this is not monitored effectively and these pupils are not making enough progress.

The governing body is not full, though concerted attempts are being made to recruit. Some members find it difficult to attend enough meetings. Nevertheless, a small group of very committed governors is working hard to become more involved in the school and has made clear initial improvements in the way it holds the school to account.

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

- Improve the quality of leadership and management for EAL and SEN – inadequate.
- Strengthen the roles of co-ordinators so that they contribute more effectively to raising standards – satisfactory.
- Develop the role of the governing body so that they are more involved in monitoring the effectiveness of the school – satisfactory.
- Develop rigorous systems of self-evaluation, and ensure that these are sharply focused on standards and achievement – inadequate.

External support

The LA is providing significant support to the school from several advisers and consultants. Individual members of staff find this support to be of good quality. The local authority's statement of action is very closely related to the school improvement plan. In itself, this is a well-judged approach, but because the school plan does not identify cogently what needs to be done to improve teaching and standards, the LA plan also does not ensure coherent support. Taken together, the plans do not show what specific improvements are intended, in what timescale, and how the support is targeted to bring about the anticipated changes.

The link adviser provides useful support and guidance to the head teacher and is realistic in his view of the school. The LA has a support group for the school but, so far, has not made a formal evaluation of the school's progress since being subject to special measures.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Although satisfactory or better progress has been made against some of the areas for improvement, in the key aspect of improving standards and teaching this has not been the case. Nor is the school currently demonstrating the capacity to improve this aspect significantly.

Quality of LA's statement of action – inadequate.

The LA should address the weaknesses identified and prepare amendments by the second monitoring inspection.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed to work in the Foundation Stage or Key Stage 1.

Priority for further improvement

- Establish a coherent plan for improving teaching and learning across the school, but particularly in Key Stage 2, evaluating progress towards this, and the impact on standards, rigorously.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Chief Education Officer for Southwark.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
HM Inspector