



22 May 2006

Mrs Margaret Windsor
The Acting Headteacher
Tower Bridge Primary School
Fair Street
Tower Bridge Road
London
SE1 2AE

Dear Mrs Windsor

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF TOWER BRIDGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Mary Summers AI to your school on 17 and 18 May 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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 acting headteacher, associate headteacher, pupils, the chair of governors, a parent governor and representatives of the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the substantive headteacher has left the school. The LA has provided two members of its central Southwark School Leaders Team (SSLT) as acting headteacher and associate headteacher. The school gained the silver Artsmark award in March.

Achievement and standards

Standards in core subjects continue to be well below average in all parts of the school. No inroads have been made into improving the rate of pupils' progress and standards in Year 2 look likely to have fallen significantly this year in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's records confirm these findings and show that progress is extremely slow from year to year. All groups, including able pupils, those with learning difficulties and those for whom English is an additional language, make inadequate progress.

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 progress

Personal development and well-being

There is a pleasant working atmosphere throughout the school. Relationships between pupils are good. They work and play together happily in class and in the playground. They are enthusiastic about their learning and willing to accept responsibility whilst feeling, however, that they have little input into the way the school develops. The weak teaching of basic skills is not conducive to giving them the skills they will need in later life. Pupils enjoy coming to school and most attend regularly and punctually. Although a few still arrive late in the mornings, most are in class by 9.40am, which is better than before.

The school has robust procedures for ensuring pupils come to school. Largely due to epidemics of childhood illness, attendance rates have fallen in recent months. They remain well below the national and local figures for primary schools although better than at the time of the October inspection. The number of unauthorised absences has fallen because of better systems introduced by the home-school liaison officer.

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

- Reduce the high levels of unauthorised absence and improve punctuality – satisfactory progress

Quality of provision

Little progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching since the last monitoring visit. A common format for planning has been introduced and this helps to ensure a reasonable structure to the lessons. Some teachers share the learning objectives with pupils and encourage the use of peer partners to focus their attention. Pupils feel secure and confident to contribute in class because of the good relationships they enjoy with their teachers.

Despite this, teaching and learning in Key Stage 2 continues to be inadequate. Even in satisfactory lessons there remain some significant weaknesses. The teaching of basic literacy and numeracy skills is of particular concern. Expectations are low and the work set undemanding. Teachers seldom plan work to challenge the more able pupils or meet the needs of those with learning difficulties or those for whom English is an additional language. Teaching assistants are poorly directed and usually have little impact on the learning of these pupils. The quality of teachers' marking continues to be variable and provides little guidance to pupils about how to improve.

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

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

Leadership and management

Since their appointment at the start of May, the acting and associate headteachers have provided a very strong positive stimulus. They have quickly and very insightfully assessed the quality of provision in the school. From this, they have plotted a shrewd course of action to bring about the much needed improvements. This includes demonstration lessons, monitoring and high-quality training of staff. Teaching staff have been involved well, helping to produce a useful list of six key components of successful teaching to which they can aspire. Rightly, there is also a strong planned focus on improving writing and numeracy. However, this is not clearly enough linked to the six identified elements of teaching.

At this very early stage, the new headship team has exceptionally high credibility and respect. Members of staff are very positive about the quality of

leadership being provided. They know the school's key priorities and feel they understand much better what is expected of them. Their views are listened to carefully and they feel very well supported and motivated. They have appreciated being given tough messages about the inadequacies of the current position clearly but positively. As a result, they feel a strong sense of responsibility and accountability to make improvements individually and as a team. The school is now, therefore, beginning to demonstrate the capacity to improve but it is too early for any significant developments in provision for pupils to have taken effect.

The management of provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language and who have special educational needs remains inadequate. This is entirely unacceptable and means that the needs of these pupils are poorly met in lessons. There is now no special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) although attempts are being made to make such an appointment. There is an action plan to improve provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language but this is very out-of-date and does not address issues identified for improvement. Success criteria need to be much clearer and, in lessons, teaching and support staff need to be made much more aware of each pupil's needs and achievements and how progress is targeted.

Curriculum leaders are enthusiastic and keen to develop their subjects. However, this works differently from subject to subject, so there is a lack of consistency, and the leaders remain unsure of how to make accurate assessments of standards and improve these. There is still no appointed English co-ordinator which is a significant weakness. However, new senior staff have been, or are in the process of being, recruited for September.

The governing body has not been able to build well enough on the initial progress noted at the last monitoring visit. Although governors continue to ask sensible questions, have planned some training and make occasional visits to the school, they have not received all the information they need to be sure of how well the school is doing. Their meeting agendas and minutes do not fully reflect the urgency of the problems facing the school. For example, there is no standing agenda item to check on progress against the identified improvement areas. A few governors still find it difficult to attend meetings. However, some vacancies have been filled and governors are committed to the school. The committee structure is appropriate.

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 progress

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

External support

The LA provides satisfactory support. Until recently, whilst providing some helpful advice, it has not acted with sufficient clarity of purpose to contribute significantly to the improvement of the school. However, it has now improved its support plan which provides an appropriate framework to support the school in improving teaching and standards. The use of consultant time, for example, is much more strategically planned. The LA monitoring of teaching in the most recent termly evaluation is accurate. Whilst the LA has acted pro-actively and rightly to provide the two SSLT staff as acting and associate headteachers, this does not, in itself, ensure future success. There is a strong need for the LA to support and check the progress of the school with greater urgency. At present, there is insufficient clarity about how the LA intends to build the capacity of the school and governing body to take back more responsibility, including a timescale for the appointment of its own substantive headteacher.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – inadequate.

The quality of the LA's statement of action is now satisfactory but needs a further addition to outline timescales and methods by which the LA intends to support the school to build its strategic capacity to self-evaluate and improve itself, including the appointment of a substantive headteacher.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed in Key Stage 2.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that the areas identified for the generic improvement of teaching are linked clearly to the planned developments in core subjects
- The governing body must work closely with the LA to agree a suitable timescale for the appointment of a substantive headteacher, to improve its own monitoring of the school, and to ensure that the school develops the capacity to take more responsibility for its own self-evaluation and improvement
- Prepare a suitable induction programme for new staff which will enable them to make swift impact from the start of the autumn term in the classroom and in curriculum leadership

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

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
HM Inspector