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Dear Mrs Corner

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BURNHAM MARKET PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 5 and 6 July 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 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

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, the headteacher designate, all teachers, members of the school council, the chair of governors and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

An acting headteacher and LA school improvement teacher have continued to work in the school; they will leave at the end of the summer term. A substantive headteacher has been appointed by the governing body for September 2006. The senior teacher who teaches the Reception and Year 1 class returned to work at the start of the summer term. The current chair of governors is relinquishing the position at the end of term. Membership of the governing body is expected to remain the same and a new chair will be elected at the earliest opportunity.

Achievement and standards

Standards have improved since the time of the inspection and more children are making suitable progress. The school's most recent Foundation Stage assessments indicate that children's standards and skills are mostly at or above expected levels. Some children do less well in some aspects of the six areas of learning but there are overall strengths in personal and physical development. A few children had lower scores in reading, writing and calculation and much lower scores in linking sounds and letters. The assessments indicate that most children are making good progress despite the interruptions in the continuity of teaching. The procedures for assessing and recording children's achievements are now more systematic and regular recording will be established from the start of next year. The Foundation Stage assessments have been moderated by the LA early years adviser who has also given useful guidance on improving assessment practice.

Assessments in Year 2 confirm that children have achieved higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics than in 2005, although the outcomes fell short of the targets set. Most children have reached the expected age-related level and three quarters of the year group have attained the higher level 2b. The outcomes for boys and girls were the same. Although there was an increase in the proportion of children reaching the higher Level 3 in reading and mathematics, too few children did so in writing. The standards achieved by Year 6 children in the national tests in English, mathematics and science were an improvement on 2005. The school exceeded its targets and results were high in all subjects and particularly so in science. The good achievement of these children reflects the strong teaching and good learning observed in Class 4.

The school has sharpened its approach to tracking progress and identifying which children are making less than expected progress. These tracking records show that the majority of children are making expected progress in Years 1, 3, 4 and 5, but that a significant minority are below the expected level for their age. The school's own analysis reveals that the majority of children receiving additional targeted support in Year 3 have begun to catch up. There is a small group however, who have made little progress in the last year and provision for these children requires urgent review. Boys' achievement is improving, helped by the focused training received by all staff. However, a significant minority of boys in Key Stage 2 have made less than expected progress in the last year in reading and writing. The school has identified the need to scrutinise more closely girls' progress in mathematics as the proportion reaching the higher levels is lower than it might be.

A catch-up programme, introduced to help children make faster progress in reading in Year 2, has proved successful this year. Outcomes were much better than in 2005. A similar programme has been implemented in Year 3/4 with much less success. Very recently, curricular targets have been introduced to help children catch up in aspects of English and mathematics where they have weaknesses. These have been drawn up following an analysis of children's assessments and will be fully in place for the coming year.

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 – good progress

Personal development and well-being

Personal development and well-being continue to be good. Children appreciate the improvements made to their learning environment and resources. They know they have learning targets to help them improve their achievements in English and mathematics and they appreciate the support they receive from their teachers and other adults to help them overcome any difficulties they may have. Children feel safe and secure; they play well together and enjoy coming to school. The school has extended the responsibility and involvement of older children by introducing a reading buddies programme in which children in Class 4 help those in Class 3. Most children cooperate well in lessons and the overwhelming majority listen and respond positively. One or two children in the classes and groups observed listened less well and did not always meet the expectations set by their teachers. Children in the school council continue to meet regularly to discuss ways in which the school might be improved. They are proud of their achievements and pleased to have had the chance to take part in making decisions about improvements in their surroundings and in the selection process for the new headteacher.

Attendance remains below the national average and the school has not met the target set for this year. There has been a very small improvement in overall attendance (91.5% to 91.9%) following the introduction of tighter monitoring procedures and incentives for good attendance. Checks are not made on whether those children who have low attendance are underachieving. Improving attendance continues to be an urgent priority.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is improving but has not yet reached the school's target of eight out of ten lessons being good or better. Regular monitoring from the acting headteacher and LA inspectors and advisers has concentrated on raising the quality of teaching and learning in English, mathematics and science. This has led to improvements in the way in which teachers use learning objectives, assess learning outcomes and involve children in talking about their learning. The pace of lessons has also improved since the last inspection visit. Support from teaching assistants in the lessons observed was usually good; it was very good when teaching assistants were fully engaged during whole class teaching, ensuring all children were included. Further support is required in helping teachers match activities more precisely to children's learning needs. Effective teaching techniques could be shared more widely through peer observations.

There were good examples during the inspection of teachers using practical activities to help children learn more effectively, for example the Year 3 catch-up group made fruit punch and biscuits to improve their understanding of units of measure. Children in Years 5 and 6 learnt about distances between the planets in the solar system through a practical investigation on the school field. The marking of children's work was found to be too variable in the latest LA monitoring visit. Since then a marking protocol has been introduced and teachers are beginning to use this to help children understand how they might improve their work. The introduction of layered curricular targets will also help teachers and children to focus on aspects of knowledge and understanding which need to improve. During the inspection visit, little use was made of ICT to support teaching and learning and this is an aspect that the school realises requires improvement.

Further improvements have been made to the quality of the learning environment and the internal decoration of the school has been transformed. Work is continuing on constructing a whole school curriculum map. Currently, few opportunities are taken to plan links between subjects and the school has not yet considered making changes in the English and mathematics curriculum in line with the revised literacy and numeracy frameworks. Clubs continue to offer a good range of enrichment activities and children thoroughly enjoyed taking part in their own World Cup competition during the lunchtime break. The school now has a register of gifted and talented children.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the acting headteacher continue to be very good. Her energy, commitment and high expectations have provided the linchpin for the school's swift improvement. Regular progress checks have been made and evaluation reports written; these focus on the improvements secured since the inspection. The school's self evaluation form has recently been rewritten and the contents have been shared with governors. The school's assessment of its effectiveness is mostly accurate. A recent survey has confirmed that parents have a more positive view of the school but there are still some who have doubts about the quality of its work. Improvements have been made in communicating with parents including sending home a half-termly information letter from each class teacher.

Support from the LA consultants and advisers has been used productively to improve teaching and learning and the leadership and management of key staff. Focussed training and support for teachers and teaching assistants has helped them to become more effective. The collection and use of data now provides a manageable system for tracking progress and identifying underachievement. There is more regular monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning and better records written on the outcomes, including a sharper focus on what children have learned. However, the quality of the lesson observation records varies and these could be evaluated to ensure they meet an agreed standard. Overall, the support received and monitoring undertaken has had a positive impact on raising the overall quality of teaching and learning.

The work of the subject leaders for English, mathematics and science is more systematic. They have drawn up monitoring schedules and now undertake more monitoring. They have been allocated time to complete several activities such as, observing lessons, scrutinising planning and interviewing children. This has led to subject leaders beginning to gain an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of provision. Currently there are no written evaluations of the outcomes of this monitoring to share with governors and to inform school self evaluation and next year's improvement plan. There is still very little monitoring undertaken in ICT and in the foundation subjects. Leadership responsibilities have been distributed more widely but the school has yet to establish clear lines of responsibility within a school leadership team.

Governors continue to improve their understanding of the work of the school. The number and regularity of governor visits has increased. Training has been completed and more is planned, and governors continue to give their full support to the acting headteacher and staff. There is a detailed governor action plan and a monitoring plan. Most monitoring records completed after visits give little indication of what action the governing body or school might take to bring about improvements. The governing body has appointed a substantive headteacher for September and the acting headteacher and headteacher designate plan to work together to ensure a smooth handover in preparation for the start of the new school year. The current chair of governors resigns from the position at the end of the summer term. Governors are aware that they need to act promptly to elect a new chair and maintain the pace of improvement.

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 continue to value the support they receive from the LA. The acting headteacher believes the support provided by the LA's inspectors and advisers has been very good and has helped to bring about several improvements. In spite of the absence through illness of the school's link inspector, monitoring visits have continued and detailed reports provide useful guidance on progress since the inspection and priorities for further improvement. The authority believes that its target for the school to "no longer require special measures" by the autumn term 2006 can still be met. However, it recognises that success will depend on the smooth transition in leadership and on sustaining the pace of improvement.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection - good

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
- Raise attendance levels
- Make more effective use of ICT to support teaching and learning

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

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Rob McKeown', with a long horizontal line extending to the right underneath it.

Rob McKeown
H M Inspector