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Mrs Margaret Windsor
The Acting Headteacher
Tower Bridge Primary School
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Dear Mrs Windsor

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF TOWER BRIDGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Marianne Harris, Additional Inspector, and Kay Johnson, Additional Inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 October 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third 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, the associate headteacher, members of staff and the governing body and a representative of the local authority (LA).

Context

The school continues to be led by an acting headteacher and an associate headteacher from the LA's central Southwark School Leaders Team. However, in September three new permanent teachers, with management responsibilities, began work at the school. Following the last monitoring visit,

the governing body and LA have agreed a timescale for the appointment of a substantive headteacher from September 2007.

Achievement and standards

There are some improvements in the unvalidated 2006 national test results but standards are still low. Achievement, especially for pupils now in Years 5 and 6, remains inadequate. However, the headteachers have initiated some good strategies for raising standards in English and mathematics, and early indications show that pupils are beginning to improve their skills in aspects of these subjects. Pupils with learning difficulties are making better progress than before because they are being supported more effectively in class. The few pupils who are at an early stage of learning English make reasonable 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 but some encouraging early signs

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' behaviour is sound and most continue to be enthusiastic, making an effort to learn. They enjoy sharing their achievements in writing and reading. However, where the teaching is weaker, behaviour and attitudes deteriorate. In some lessons, pupils are able to develop their skills in decision-making, helping each other and sharing their views, but opportunities for this at other times remain too limited, as at the last monitoring visit. The buddy system and school council are in their infancy and not embedded in the culture of the school. The quality of assemblies varies from inadequate to good: behaviour is at its best and most reflective when the assemblies are most interesting, calm and engaging.

Some pupils in each class still arrive late despite the more robust procedures which have been implemented. Attendance rates have fluctuated during the last year but show no sustained improvement. Hard work has been put into this by school staff but with little impact yet.

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

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

Quality of provision

Since the last monitoring inspection, there has been a number of improvements to teaching. This is most notable for pupils up to Year 4. The curriculum has also been helpfully redesigned so that progression routes are clearer and the local environment is better used.

In many lessons, teachers are engaging and involving pupils better. Teaching assistants now often support pupils well, especially those with learning difficulties. The clear focus on promoting basic skills and the introduction of 'Big Writing' have begun to have a positive impact. Teachers have set helpful targets for pupils, but these are still at an early stage. However, the teaching and learning in Years 5 and 6 is still not of sufficient quality to ensure that these pupils, the lowest achievers in the school, make the progress needed to attain as well as they can. In Year 6, there are positive signs, nevertheless, as lessons are well-paced and pupils' attitudes to learning are improving.

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

The acting and associate headteachers have continued the constructive work they started just before the last monitoring inspection. They provide supportive and clear educational leadership which motivates the staff. The whole school is pulling together and morale remains high. The headteachers' self-evaluation is detailed and usually accurate, enabling them to establish many appropriate priorities and plans. However, whilst the headteachers have taken some necessary hard decisions since their arrival in May, there are still areas of significant weakness, identified in this letter, which have not yet been addressed effectively.

The recently appointed senior staff members are highly committed and were inducted exceptionally well. Consequently, the new senior management team is making a difference already. The leadership of core subjects is more

energetic. Productive teamwork between new and existing staff, and the effective improvement planning, leads to the better teaching. However, the senior team is large and it is important that its efficiency should be constantly re-evaluated. Additionally, the leadership of foundation subjects, by staff outside the senior management team, remains underdeveloped.

The management of provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) has improved well. The new inclusion manager has involved staff fully in providing for the needs of these pupils in lessons and focused interventions, with clear and specific targets. Their progress is tracked well. There have also been some smaller improvements for pupils for whom English is an additional language. The inclusion manager is on a temporary contract but the changes being made are designed to be sustainable.

The governing body continues to have vacancies and only a tiny number of active members. These committed governors provide steadfast support in several ways. For example, they are involved in dealing with a budget deficit and ask shrewd questions of managers in some areas. However, the issues referred to in the last monitoring letter have not been adequately addressed. The governing body is receiving better information from the school and LA but depends too much on the headteachers. It does not have the strength in depth to help steer the school or challenge managers' thinking appropriately about all the areas of weakness. For example, governors tend to monitor the school by checking that actions have happened rather than by their quality or impact, which helps lead to some weaknesses not being dealt with robustly enough. This impedes confidence in the school's longer-term future.

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

- Improve the quality of leadership and management for EAL and SEN - good progress for SEN; satisfactory progress for EAL
- Strengthen and develop the roles of co-ordinators so that they contribute more effectively to raising standards - satisfactory progress in core subjects; inadequate progress in foundation subjects.
- Develop the role of the governing body so 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

LA support to the school is significantly better than before, especially in promoting better teaching. Advisory help is well targeted and is making a positive impact. The new link adviser provides useful assistance. However, despite the governing body's fragile position, and the comments in the last monitoring letter about this, the LA has not taken effective action to help build its capacity; nor has it invoked its powers in relation to governance. Also, the school continues to need robust support from the education welfare service to help deal with the obstinately low attendance rate of some pupils.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate. The school made a slow start in special measures and, despite recent progress, many of the weaknesses identified in the October 2005 inspection remain.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory. Necessary improvements in teaching and learning have begun well in many year groups.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

The school continues to require special measures.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to improve teaching, addressing weaknesses robustly
- Ensure the governance arrangements are strong enough to meet the school's needs; and that the progress of the school is monitored more rigorously by the governing body
- Improve attendance and punctuality. (From the next monitoring visit, the key issue about attendance and punctuality will deal specifically with all absence, not only that which is unauthorised).

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