



1 November 2006

Mrs Jane Gornell  
The Acting Headteacher  
Old Hall Primary School  
Old Hall Drive  
Gorton  
Manchester  
M18 7FU

Dear Mrs Gornell

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF OLD HALL PRIMARY SCHOOL

### Introduction

Following my visit with Kath Halifax and Linda Murphy, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 31 October and 1 November, 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 February 2006.

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### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, visited 19 lessons or part lessons, scrutinised documents, spoke to pupils and met with the headteacher, the full leadership team, governors, administrative staff and associate headteacher.

### Context

Since the last visit several teaching posts have been made substantive and new appointments have been made. In addition to the acting headteacher, only two of the teaching staff are now secondees from the local authority's intervention team: the two temporary assistant headteachers.

On the second day of this visit all Key Stage 2 pupils took part in a school-based music event for part of the morning, and the Nursery classes were out on a trip to the Manchester Art Gallery. The majority of lessons observed on this visit were English lessons.

## Achievement and standards

Standards across the school remain low overall and significantly below national expectations at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. Nevertheless, there are signs of improvement. In the national tests for 11-year-olds in summer 2006, standards rose in the three core subjects. The proportion of pupils gaining Level 4 or above in mathematics and English rose from 38% in 2005 to 54% this year. In science, the figure rose from 34% to 63%. These figures though are still below the national floor targets.

In the tests for seven-year-olds, the proportion of pupils gaining Level 2c or above in reading rose from 56% last year to 70% this year. In writing, it plateaued at around 58% but in mathematics results rose significantly from 69% in the previous year to 90% this year. However, no pupils gained the higher Level 3 in any of the core subjects and the proportion gaining Level 2b in writing fell.

The school is therefore eating into the very long tail of underachievement at the lowest levels in both key stages, but still has a long way to go to help more pupils attain at national expectations and above.

Standards observed in lessons in English in Key Stage 1 are rising as a result of the significant efforts taken to improve provision since the last monitoring visit. Pupils' skills in the use of phonics and high frequency words, in reading and in early writing all show signs of improvement, as does the volume of the writing that they now do. Handwriting, particularly correct letter formation, and presentation of their work remain variable due mainly to the inconsistency in approach displayed by teachers. Some teachers still do not appreciate that good writing habits need to be instilled early, that incorrect letter formation needs to be tackled and that their own handwriting, as modelled in pupils' books or on the board, needs to be of the highest standard. In some classes, letter orientation and size are left to individual pupils to discover for themselves. Poor pencil grip goes uncorrected in the Foundation Stage; this is particularly important for the significant number of children in the school who are left-handed. There is also an apparent lack of understanding by some staff that some pupils for whom English is an additional language would normally be introduced to writing from right to left and that this is affecting their approach to sounding out words and to writing them.

Importantly, pupils in Key Stage 1 now display positive attitudes. They are keen and eager to learn, and on this visit showed no signs of disaffection. This is a significant improvement.

In Key Stage 2, the standards seen in lessons and in pupils' books still reflect the significant gaps in pupils' skills and knowledge. Standards are improving but at a much slower rate than in Key Stage 1.

The recent developments in the teaching of spelling and handwriting and the sharper focus on the teaching of writing are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' work. English work is neater overall and there is more of it. In some instances there is evidence of pupils responding to higher expectations of them but this is not so in all classes. The standards attained by pupils are directly related to how consistently teachers apply the new agreed procedures, identifying errors immediately and requiring pupils to correct them. The focus on speaking and listening is beginning to pay dividends, particularly in pupils' approach to writing.

New tighter assessment procedures have identified and in some instances confirmed the senior leadership team's view of the overall range of pupil achievement. It has highlighted clearly that the next major priority is to improve the very weak reading skills of Key Stage 2 pupils. For example, the majority of Year 6 pupils have reading skills at around Level 2; that is, the level expected of Key Stage 1 pupils. As a matter of urgency, the school must now tackle this.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2006:

- Raise standards and improve progress for all groups of pupils – satisfactory progress

#### Personal development and well-being

The measures taken to ensure that parents and pupils know the importance of regular attendance to accelerate pupils' learning have improved. Much of this is down to the efforts of the administrative staff. As a result, the rate of attendance for the first half of the autumn term 2006, at 93.3%, is higher than for the same period in 2005. Differences between the attendance rates of different classes are narrowing. Despite the school's strenuous efforts, attendance is below the national average and the school has yet to meet its targets. Although support is given from the local authority much of this is for a retrospective half-term period based on the school's data. The school has yet to make the fullest use of the information it collects promptly to target pupils whose attendance is particularly low. The school is well placed to do so, however, because it uses an electronic system of registration which means that data is readily available to inform its work. Efforts will need to continue because there is often a direct link between pupils' poor attendance and low levels of attainment.

A significant number of pupils are persistently late for the start of school. There are appropriate procedures to monitor punctuality but these are not applied rigorously enough to combat the daily stream of latecomers.

The school is an orderly community. Pupils' behaviour is satisfactory around school; pupils are well supervised and are sensible on the stairs and corridors. School rules and systems of rewards and sanctions promote good

behaviour. As a result there have been no exclusions so far this academic year, compared to eight overall in the previous two terms. It is when teaching is inadequate and insufficiently meets the needs of the pupils that the behaviour of a significant minority is poor in lessons and detracts from the learning of the majority. The quality of play at lunchtimes is somewhat over-boisterous. There are very few resources for pupils to use and the lunchtime staff are not yet engaging pupils sufficiently in games and activities to enhance their leisure time.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2006:

- Continue to work with pupils, their parents and carers to improve attendance – satisfactory progress

### Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is improving, but is still inconsistent. Of the 19 lessons or part lessons observed, four were inadequate, ten satisfactory and five good.

Considerable improvement has been made in Key Stage 1 and in Year 6. This is reflected in pupils' progress and improving standards. In other year groups, however, teaching is too variable. Some teachers are still experiencing difficulties in managing behaviour. As a result, learning is disrupted. Nevertheless, overall, pupils' learning is improving because teachers plan their lessons conscientiously. They note the knowledge and skills to be acquired during each lesson, and generally they plan tasks that are matched to pupils' abilities. This aids progress. However, in some cases the activity is too difficult so pupils become frustrated and give up. This was so when pupils with very low reading ages in a Key Stage 2 class gave up when expected to make words using the prefixes 'circum', 'tele' and 'bi'.

Teaching assistants are hard-working but their contribution to learning varies. Some teachers use their assistants well. They plan lessons together so the assistants understand how they can aid pupils' progress. This is not the case in all classes; in some assistants are unsure of what is expected of them are not used to full capacity.

Marking is improving and in many cases is helping pupils understand what they need to do to make better progress. Some teachers though, are still allowing mistakes to go uncorrected, so pupils continue to make the same errors. For example, in one Key Stage 2 class, pupils' handwriting books revealed that individuals had incorrectly copied the date from the board, day after day, and this had not been picked up or corrected. All teachers have made considerable efforts to make their classrooms effective learning environments. This is particularly so with displays to support literacy and mathematics. Pupils are becoming increasingly confident, referring to the

displays, for example, when using connectives to make their writing more interesting.

The provision in the Reception class is improving, but planning in the Nursery does not sufficiently link the activities together to broaden children's understanding. Furthermore, the quality of teaching and learning differs between the two classes. The curriculum in Key Stages 1 and 2 is improving. An annual plan has been produced which gives a clearer picture of what pupils will learn and when. Of equal importance, timetables have been rethought. In most classes, the important subjects of English and mathematics are taught each morning when pupils are fresh and receptive to learning. The time spent in lessons has increased, though some teachers are still lax in ensuring that lessons start promptly after breaks.

New procedures have been established at the start of the school day. Staff are in the playground to receive pupils; this helps all to feel welcome and it provides a good opportunity for parents to speak informally to staff. The times of the school day are made clear but even so many families do not make the most of these early morning arrangements because they arrive too late. Their children often miss out on registration and the start of assembly, chatting to their teacher. Reorganised staggered break times are working well. They are well supervised and provide the opportunities for pupils from different year groups to socialise.

On this visit, the school playing field was not in use. Clear procedures for its use at lunchtime are very reliant on the deployment of personnel because the school has not yet arranged for the area to be fully fenced. Furthermore, in its current state the playing field is not a safe place for pupils to play because of debris left by other users.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2006:

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning ensuring that teachers challenge their pupils realistically and have high expectations of what they can achieve – satisfactory progress

#### Leadership and management

The acting headteacher continues to provide good, effective leadership of the school, setting a clear direction and timetable for improvement. She is ably supported by the two temporary assistant headteachers.

Since the last monitoring visit much has been implemented to tackle the shortcomings then identified. The acting headteacher and assistant headteachers have pursued with rigour these initial actions but know there is still much more to be done. Work has been carried out on improving early reading and writing in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, classroom environments, teachers' marking, teachers' planning, writing in Key Stage 2,

and the management of pupils' behaviour. Additionally, one assistant headteacher has taken the lead on developing whole-school curriculum planning and establishing clearer timetabling arrangements.

The senior leadership team has also begun to support the development of the next layer of managers in the school, a response to one of the concerns raised in the previous report. As a result, all staff, including the higher level teaching assistants, now have a role in leading and managing one or more subject or aspect areas and have produced an action plan and position statement for this. At this point in their development their impact is limited but satisfactory.

The leadership of the Foundation Stage is unsatisfactory because the Nursery curriculum is insufficiently well planned and monitored to meet the needs of the children and accelerate their learning. The quality of teaching in the Nursery is variable.

Governors are becoming more active in holding the school to account. The co-option of new governors has brought fresh ideas and considerable expertise to the school. For example, backgrounds in education or in assisting schools in special measures means governors know the questions to ask to make sure the school is improving. Furthermore, they have the confidence and credibility to do so. Though at an early stage of development, the strategic and monitoring committee already has clear plans of what is needed to challenge all aspects of the school's work.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2006:

- Ensure that leaders monitor and evaluate performance rigorously in all areas of school life and take effective action to make improvements where necessary – satisfactory progress
- Ensure that the governing body holds the school rigorously to account for its performance – satisfactory progress

#### External support

The school is developing effective links with another Manchester primary school to support staff development. It continues to receive support from local authority consultants.

#### Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

## Priorities for further improvement

- Tackle the large deficits in pupils' reading in Key Stage 2, starting with Year 6.
- Ensure consistency in the quality of teaching and learning.
- Deal with the high levels of lateness to school.

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

Yours sincerely

Angela Westington  
H M Inspector