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Miss L McLanachan
Headteacher
Intack Primary School
Whitebirk Road
Blackburn
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Dear Miss McLanachan,

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF INTACK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with David Byrne, Additional Inspector, to your school on 14 and 15 November 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 March 2006.

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

During the inspection visit, 14 parts of lessons, 2 registration sessions and an assembly were observed. Interviews were held with the headteacher, the chair of governors, senior staff members, middle leaders, pupils and a representative from the local authority (LA). Informal discussions took place with members of staff and pupils. Examples of pupils' work were examined during lessons.

Context

Since the inspection, a new and highly experienced headteacher has been appointed to the school. She took up her post in April 2006. In addition, the LA has appointed a consultant headteacher to support the work of the leadership team. Two members of staff have left the school and a further two have joined. Membership of the governing body has remained stable although longstanding vacancies for parent governors remain. The school has invested substantially in new resources and all classrooms now have interactive whiteboards.

Achievement and standards

Preliminary test results in the national tests for 2006 demonstrate that standards at Key Stages 1 and 2 remain inadequate. Pupils have not made the progress which they should in their learning because in the past they have regularly experienced weak teaching, poor curriculum coverage and low expectations of what they can achieve.

When pupils start school their knowledge and skills are significantly below average. In previous years, inadequate progress in the Reception classes has resulted in pupils entering Key Stage 1 with underdeveloped social, communication and numeracy skills. By the time pupils are seven years of age, most achieve standards in reading, writing and mathematics which are significantly below average because they do not make progress in line with their capabilities. This adversely affects their performance at Key Stage 2. Pupils' poor literacy and numeracy skills in particular hamper their learning and this limits the progress which they make in all subjects. By the time pupils are 11 years of age only half achieve expected standards in English and mathematics. The more able pupils significantly underachieve.

Since the arrival of the new headteacher in April 2006, many of the weaknesses highlighted in the inspection report are now starting to be addressed. A range of measures designed to tackle the school's history of underachievement has been introduced and much has been done to raise expectations amongst staff of what pupils can achieve. For example, systems to improve the use of assessment information and lesson planning are now in place and some good practice is emerging. In the reception classes for example, teachers make good use of assessment information to plan learning and track pupils' progress. This is helping pupils to learn at a much faster rate than in previous years. Teachers in other parts of the school are also beginning to use assessment information to plan learning but, as yet, not all are using it well. Too many pupils are still given activities which do not sufficiently match their learning needs and this limits their

progress. Nonetheless, the needs of all learners overall are better understood and more appropriately provided for than at the time of the inspection.

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

- Significantly raise standards and pupils' progress in literacy and numeracy throughout the school – inadequate progress

Personal development and well-being

Pupils are responding well to new strategies to improve behaviour and reward positive attitudes. Throughout the school pupils willingly help others and enjoy school life. They are proud when they receive rewards for good work or desirable behaviour. They willingly offer praise to classmates who do well. Behaviour is mostly satisfactory and often good. At Key Stage 1, progress in lessons is however hampered by the immature behaviour of some pupils who distract others and interrupt learning. On occasions, this is caused by work not being suitably matched to pupils' learning needs but more often because these pupils pay little attention to the behavioural expectations which staff have of them. Key Stage 2 pupils are generally polite and well mannered but some incidents of misbehaviour occur, mostly amongst groups of boys. Attendance is still well below average but improving because procedures for monitoring absence are more rigorous and there is closer liaison with support agencies. Nonetheless, a small number of families persist in regularly sending pupils to school late and this remains a significant challenge for the school to overcome. Swift action has been taken to strengthen the school's procedures for child protection. These are now thorough and rigorous. All procedures for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements.

Progress on the areas of improvements identified by the inspection in March 2006:

- Urgently ensure all staff are trained in child-protection procedures – good progress
- Continue to raise levels of attendance – satisfactory progress

Quality of provision

Teaching is now better than at the time of the inspection in March because new staff have joined the school and the senior leadership team has taken important steps to improve matters in key areas. The quality of teaching now ranges from good to inadequate although too much teaching is still satisfactory. However, there is less inadequate teaching than at the time of the previous inspection, but there is not yet enough good teaching to raise standards and enable pupils are to achieve as well as they should.

Actions taken by the leadership team have improved the quality of lesson planning and assessment information. The quality of planning in the Foundation Stage is now good because staff use assessment information well to ensure that the curriculum meets pupils' learning needs. Consequently, Reception-age pupils are now making good progress.

In most other classes, teachers are not using assessment information well enough when planning lessons. Teachers are attempting to take account of the pupils' differing abilities in each class and make provision for them. Too often however work does not meet pupils' learning needs because not enough account has been taken of what pupils already know and can do. Furthermore, teachers do not fully recognise the significant weaknesses many pupils have in their basic skills. Consequently, pupils are often left frustrated because they are not able to complete tasks and this results in inadequate progress. In a Key Stage 2 lesson for example, pupils' actual knowledge and understanding of mathematics were as much as two years below the level of task provided for them. In another lesson in Key Stage 1, texts used in a literacy lesson contained vocabulary which pupils could not read.

Many pupils are capable of taking more responsibility for their learning but opportunities for them to do so are rarely built into lessons. In some classes at both Key Stage 1 and 2, pupils still spend too much time listening to the teacher and following directions.

Some good changes have been made to the systems for assessing and tracking the progress of pupils in English and mathematics. A consistently applied approach to setting targets is being established and involves pupils in monitoring how well they are achieving. The marking of pupils work has also improved, but too often marking tends to confirm pupils' successes rather than helping them understand how to improve towards their targets.

The curriculum is improving, with particularly positive changes occurring in the Foundation Stage. In Years 1 to 6, a strong emphasis has rightly been given to the development of pupils' basic skills. A range of 'catch up' programmes is successfully helping lower ability pupils to improve their basic skills and these pupils are well supported. Appropriate plans are being implemented to improve links between subjects and to broaden opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their literacy, numeracy and information technology skills in other subjects of the curriculum.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and raise teachers' expectations of what pupils are able to do, including their capacity to work independently – inadequate progress
- Ensure systems for marking pupils' work, tracking their progress and informing future targets are in place and consistently used across the school – satisfactory progress
- Ensure work set meets the needs of pupils and programmes to raise achievement are put into place – inadequate progress

Leadership and management

The new headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, has done much to improve the quality of leadership and management since the inspection. There is now a secure focus on raising standards, and improved monitoring has ensured that senior staff have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and where improvement is required. The school's strategic plan systematically targets those areas which require improvement. However, the headteacher has rightly decided that the plan needs updating to reflect more accurately the changes that have occurred since the inspection in March and to sharpen the focus on those areas which require improvement the most. Notably, this includes making better use of assessment information when teachers are planning lessons.

Not enough has yet been done to improve the work of subject leaders although action on this is now imminent. Whilst these staff have a clearer understanding of their role and how standards in their own subjects can be raised, they have had little opportunity yet to monitor their subjects well enough because the school's focus has been to improve literacy and numeracy.

The introduction of a performance management system, although planning is well advanced, has not yet been implemented and remains a significant task to be accomplished.

Governors demonstrate high ambition for the school and a keen determination to improve matters. They now have a clearer understanding of the school's performance and are more likely to exert challenge than previously. Governors are more visible around the school and this will shortly include governors monitoring the work classes to which they have been linked.

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

- Develop the capacity of the school's leadership, and implement monitoring and evaluation to provide an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses – satisfactory progress

External support

The LA has an accurate understanding of the school's specific needs. Its staff have provided timely and effective help to the school and this has supported well the improvements which are evident, particularly to leadership and management and in the quality of teaching and learning. Whilst the LA's statement of action is clear and well targeted it does not sufficiently reflect its confidence in the school's leadership to take greater responsibility for its own improvement. It now requires review in order to establish:

- a clear separation of roles and responsibilities between itself and the school;
- a clear recognition that the LA is supporting the school to build its own independent internal capacity in order to achieve self-sustaining improvement in the longer term;
- a plan which demonstrates how the LA will reduce the time it spends supporting the school as the school becomes more effective in managing its own affairs.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Quality of LA's statement of action - satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed subject to the agreement of the monitoring HMI.

Priorities for further improvement

- Make certain that all teachers use assessment information accurately when planning learning to ensure that activities provided meet the learning needs of all pupils and supports them to make progress in line with the capabilities.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, chair of governors and the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning for Blackburn and Darwen.

Yours sincerely

Tom Grieveson
H M Inspector