



03 January 2007

Mrs Maddie Oldershaw
The Headteacher
Pear Tree Community Junior School
Pear Tree Street
Derby
DE23 8PN

Dear Mrs Oldershaw

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF PEAR TREE JUNIOR SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Mr Kris Sharma and Mr John Foster, Additional Inspectors to your school on 6 and 7 December 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

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher; the senior management team, two subject leaders, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative of the local authority (LA).

Context

The school has continued to experience a high turnover of pupils, mainly Eastern European, more of whom join than leave. The number on roll has risen to 309. Two assistant headteachers have been appointed, one of whom was an internal appointment. Staff absence through illness remains a barrier to development to some degree and the school finds it extremely difficult to

attract suitable permanent and temporary staff. Two classes are presently being taught by temporary teachers.

Achievement and standards

Progress throughout the school remains inconsistent and therefore many pupils are not achieving as well as they could. The school's baseline assessment of pupils entering Year 3 indicates that they are performing well below in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards remain very low throughout the school and a significant minority of pupils do not make sufficient progress. In 2006, the test results at Year 6 in all three core subjects were well below the provisional national averages. The results were very similar to those of 2005 in science but lower in English. However, there was a considerable improvement in mathematics. Given their starting point, these results demonstrate that the progress of the pupils who left that year was better than the 2005 cohort. Encouragingly, the proportion of pupils gaining level 3 has risen. This demonstrates that the school's intervention strategies, to bolster the performance of pupils just below the national average, are working. The proportion of pupils who gained the higher level 5 was very low overall, although the data suggests that many of the more able pupils make adequate progress.

The test data and the school's own assessment information indicates that some pupils did not make enough progress during the last year. Evidence shows variations in achievement where, for example, pupils from Black Caribbean backgrounds make much better progress than those from a Pakistani heritage. In many lessons, standards are low and progress is often insufficient because there is still too much unsatisfactory teaching. Nevertheless, standards are rising in those classes and groups where teaching is challenging and pitched at a suitable level for those in the class. The termly collection and analysis of data has given the school useful details about the progress which each pupil is making. The system alerts the school to pupils who are not making the expected progress. The arrangements for keeping track of pupils' progress between these termly assessments are also in place. The school is now poised to make a fuller use of assessment information to raise standards.

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

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science by improving the quality and consistency of teaching and ensuring that all pupils are appropriately challenged - inadequate progress

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development remains satisfactory. They enjoy school and many attend regularly. However, there are too many families who do not recognise that their children need to attend school regularly, especially those from Eastern European countries. These regular absences significantly limit the progress the pupils make. Though the school works hard to encourage regular attendance, levels remain well below those nationally. Pupils are given good opportunities to work for the school through elected class and school councils. The school council has worked well with the staff to improve facilities for pupils, such as the provision of playground activities at breaktimes.

Quality of provision

While the quality of teaching is good in some parts of the school, too much is still inadequate. Where teaching is not strong enough the teachers spend too much time over explanations and do not allow the pupils enough time to complete their work. Although planning is generally sound, and for English and mathematics is based on the national strategies, there are times when the work is not planned well enough for pupils' differing ability levels. In mathematics, for example, the work set for pupils is often too hard for them and is based on their age, rather than their ability or needs. In many lessons the teachers have very good strategies for managing behaviour and the pupils respond well to them. However, other teachers allow too much noise and this distracts from learning.

The quality of marking remains inconsistent. At its best it helps the pupils to understand what they need to do to improve their work but too often it does not identify clearly enough what pupils are doing well and how improvements can be made. In many cases the teachers do not follow up their marking well enough to ensure that their comments have been acted upon by the pupils. For example, when teachers have indicated that pupils should complete work, this has not been done. Most teachers acknowledge when pupils have achieved the objective of the lesson. Pupils are given targets, which are displayed in their books, but these are often generic for a group or the class and not sufficiently well aimed at individual needs. While these are checked for completion, there is no indication of when and how quickly they have been achieved. Teaching assistants are used well throughout the school and give good support to their assigned pupils and groups. In some lessons, they are used well to support the teaching.

The curriculum is satisfactory overall, but there is some slippage of time during the morning sessions. The timings of the school day do not allow time to be used as efficiently as possible. The only lessons taught during the morning are English and mathematics but the arrangement of time does not enable the school to use the mornings effectively enough when the pupils are

freshest. While most subjects are given enough curriculum time, the school allows less than the recommended time for science, the core subject where progress has been worst.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and ensure that all pupils are appropriately challenged – see above

Leadership and management

The leadership and management skills of the recently formed, but inexperienced senior leadership team are improving. The assistant headteachers have an adequate understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They provide satisfactory support for the headteacher and there is evidence of good potential. After a short period when there was some resistance, the headteacher has brought the staff together as a team and there is a general willingness to work hard to eliminate the school's shortcomings. However, many of the staff are at an early stage in understanding their role in these developments. Subject leaders have made a start in putting together their own action plans. As a result, teachers are beginning to pay greater attention to developing a more interesting curriculum and making better links between subjects. There is a growing understanding of the implications of the revised Primary Strategy and the school is embracing its emphasis on speaking and listening: key skills for these pupils to develop.

With the support of the LA, the school is using a wider range of measures to evaluate its own effectiveness. The recently developed systems for collecting, collating and analysing test and assessment information are sophisticated. They have good potential for enabling the senior leadership team to form an accurate overview of the whole school performance. The school has identified some areas as a focus for support and development, However, the system is very new and its full potential to analyse the progress of specific groups has not yet been realised. Lesson observations have been carried out, but the recording of these is not sufficiently evaluative, and does not focus well enough on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning or whether standards are high enough. Some evaluations are over-generous. Nevertheless, the headteacher has an understanding of the broad areas of weakness in teaching and support is being given, although the impact has so far been limited. Appropriate priorities for improvement have been identified and progress is checked, although this tends to be informal and unrecorded. Arrangements to follow up these observations within a given timescale have slipped.

There has been some monitoring of pupils' work, in conjunction with the LA, but this has not been done regularly or with sufficient rigour to identify the

specific areas where improvement is needed and to evaluate progress. Planning for school improvement, while improving, is at an early stage of development. The headteacher has an adequate understanding of the broad areas where improvement is most urgently needed and of how priorities should be tackled but there is no long-term strategic view. All areas identified by the inspection of March 2006 are being tackled, actions are largely appropriate and timings reflect the urgency required. Arrangements for monitoring progress are adequate but the success criteria and strategies for evaluation are not specific enough to demonstrate how effective the actions have been.

There are satisfactory, and developing, links with the feeder infant school, which are providing teachers with a fuller understanding of standards on entry to this school. The governing body is developing its role satisfactorily and has undertaken training to support this. The chair of governors keeps up to date with developments through regular visits. However, the headteacher's reports to the governing body are superficial. They do not give sufficient information for the governing body to evaluate the impact of the initiatives or the progress being made. The governing body minutes also lack the detail that demonstrates careful consideration of these and how they are holding the school to account. Links with parents continue to improve and the school is consulting them with more purpose and effect.

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

- Secure the school's management structure and staff roles and responsibilities to provide a strong direction for improvement at all levels - adequate progress
- Ensure that the quality of self-evaluation is rigorous, inclusive of staff, governors, parents and pupils and is embedded in the school's work - inadequate progress

External support

The LA has provided satisfactory support for the school and has coordinated its interventions well. It has worked in sound partnership with the school leadership so that there is increasing agreement about the most urgent priorities and how they should be tackled. The LA's statement is satisfactory. It contains most of the information required, although it does not demonstrate how the LA supported the school prior to the inspection, when it was identified as having serious weaknesses. The LA intends to support the school through links with a partner school but does not show how this will be done. The partnership was slow to develop, because of staffing difficulties throughout the city, but is beginning to bear fruit, particularly in the teaching of reading. The target date for the removal of special measures is over-ambitious, given the school's circumstances. The arrangements for support

and monitoring are suitable but the strategies for evaluating the LA's own effectiveness are weak.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Monitor teaching and pupils' progress more frequently and rigorously, recording the results and agreed actions in every instance, and put in place effective and urgent strategies to improve them
- Revise school development planning so that there is a clear, long-term strategic view and that the effectiveness of these plans are evaluated stringently against explicit and measurable criteria
- Continue to develop the skills of all subject leaders so that they begin to take greater responsibility for standards in their subjects
- Keep the governing body fully informed about the progress the school is making and ensure that their discussions are minuted fully

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

Yours sincerely

Deemed signed in absence of signature

Mrs Pat Cox
Additional Inspector