



17 January 2007

Mr David Rose
The Headteacher
Bushfield School
Moon Street
Wolverton
Milton Keynes
MK12 5JG

Dear Mr Rose

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BUSHFIELD SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with Jo Curd, Additional Inspector and Jennifer Hall, Additional Inspector, to your school on 9 and 10 January 2007, 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 July 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 and leadership team, groups of pupils, the chair of governors and a representative from the Local Authority (LA). Discussions were held with staff responsible for pupils with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language. Fourteen lessons or parts of lessons and an assembly were inspected. Inspectors looked through samples of pupils' recorded work and results from national tests for Year 6 pupils in English, mathematics and science, as well as teachers' assessments in other year groups.

Context

Two assistant headteachers have been appointed to replace the deputy headteacher who left last term. Both appointments are temporary until substantive positions are secured in September 2007. One of the assistant headteachers was seconded from another school in the LA. In addition, two part-time teachers joined the school.

Achievement and standards

Standards in lessons remain well below average and pupils underachieve in relation to their starting points. In most year groups, the proportion of pupils reaching or exceeding the standards expected for their age remains too low. There has been some marginal improvements to standards in some classes, due to some effective teaching. However the legacy of weak basic skills in most classes, particularly in reading, writing, and mathematics, is hampering the progress pupils make, including that seen in science. Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching are failing to accelerate pupils' progress sufficiently for there to be sustained improvements to standards over time.

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

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science, and ensure that pupils reach their potential – inadequate progress

Personal development and well-being

The personal development and well being of the pupils continue to be good. Pupils are well behaved in and out of lessons because teachers apply consistent expectations for good behaviour. Pupils of different ages play well together in the playground. They enjoy participating in the many sports provided and enjoy healthy school meals, which contribute well to their healthy lifestyles.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development remains good. They have a good understanding of cultural diversity. Pupils were particularly attentive and interested in an assembly outlining one of their teacher's adventures to Gambia. Pupils take initiative in lessons and respond well to opportunities to work independently and cooperatively. Their views and ideas are welcomed and valued and they contribute well to their school community through the school council, practical tasks in assemblies and helping in class. Pupils are keen to learn and quick to do as they are asked even during some laboured and ineffective lessons. They develop good attitudes that prepare

them well for the future but their academic development is hampered by relatively slow progress in learning basic skills in English and mathematics.

Quality of provision

The teaching remains inadequate. Most of the lessons seen were satisfactory but there were too few that were good or better. One outstanding lesson was observed in Year 4 where the teaching is having a positive impact on the pupils in that class. This profile of teaching is similar to that found at the time of the school's inspection in July and represents inadequate improvement. Consequently, the teaching is failing to accelerate progress and raise standards. Analyses of test results and of pupils' performance over time also point to inadequate teaching.

In the better lessons, planning is more precise so that tasks are well matched to the needs and abilities of the pupils. In these lessons teachers' questioning helps the pupils to share and extend their thinking and remains closely focused on the core learning intentions of the lesson. Consequently, pupils are clear about what to do and how best to improve their work further.

Ineffective teaching was typified by overly laboured introductions where the pupils were too passive and not fully engaged in class discussions. Planning in these lessons does not take account of the needs of pupils of different abilities so the pace of learning is uneven. There remain inconsistencies so that tasks in lessons are not always as challenging as they should be or, in some cases, they are too difficult for some pupils. There has not been enough improvement in planning work to meet the specific needs of pupils with learning difficulties, and pupils who are at an early stage of learning English. The specific needs of these pupils are too often neglected in lesson plans and in longer-term curriculum plans. In the most effective lessons teaching assistants provide good support, but this is inconsistent across classes and year groups. Consequently, pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are not always supported well enough to ensure they reach their targets.

Teachers' marking is regular and reasonably consistent across the school but in some books comments are not helpful to the pupils. Teachers respond positively to pupils' efforts, although some of the praise given is too generous and teachers miss opportunities to help pupils to improve their work.

Teachers' assessments are generally inaccurate, despite the best efforts of team leaders in each year group who are responsible for moderating

assessments. Since the last inspection tracking systems have become more systematic but they are not being used robustly enough to plan work that will help pupils reach their targets. In some classes, targets to help pupils improve their writing and mathematics are displayed. For example, pupils in Year 6 talked confidently about their targets and know what to do to reach the next level because of the support they get from their teachers. However, this is not typical across the school as teachers' subject knowledge is inconsistent, particularly in developing pupils' writing and mathematics skills. Consequently, pupils are not developing their writing with confidence or accuracy. In addition, they lack the confidence to tackle number problems independently because they do not learn consistent methods of calculation as they go through the school. These inconsistencies partly explain the pupils' underachievement in science.

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

- Make significant improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. Ensure that teachers have higher expectations of their pupils and provide achievable challenges to pupils of all levels of ability – inadequate progress
- Make rigorous use of the new systems for checking pupils' progress to set and constantly review challenging targets for pupils to meet – inadequate progress

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the school remain inadequate. There have been some improvements to development planning, helped and monitored by the LA, which sets out milestones for senior staff to check for improvements. The last inspection report judged that substantial staff changes over recent years had hampered the progress made by the school. Since then, changes to the leadership team and the more effective deployment of team leaders in each year group, are beginning to provide stability. The leadership of the school has failed, up to now, to develop and improve the quality of teaching so inconsistencies still remain across classes and year groups.

The headteacher has worked closely with governors to secure some improvements to staffing and changes to the leadership team. Each year group is led by a team leader so that responsibilities for monitoring and supporting teachers are now distributed more widely. The senior leadership team, which now includes the chair of governors and two assistant headteachers, provides the basis for a more systematic approach to development planning and monitoring. These changes have begun to

galvanise the staff who now feel they are working towards a common goal. In this respect, morale is quite high and teachers are receptive to change and demonstrate a willingness to work as a team towards school improvement. However, the school's improvement plan has not been sufficiently prioritised so there is a lack of focus, particularly in improving the teaching. The milestones for improvement are not broken down into manageable steps. Consequently, the success criteria in the plan are too broad or vague, which is not helping to provide a focus for improving key aspects of teaching.

Since the last inspection, staff changes have affected the pace of change so that progress measured against the milestones in the school improvement plan has been marginal and not sufficient. The monitoring of teaching and of pupils' performance has been patchy and remains a weakness. The headteacher's evaluations of lessons are too general and do not link to other aspects of school improvement, for example, in determining how best to improve the teaching of writing or mathematics across the school.

Team leaders in each year group and the senior leadership team are responsible for checking standards and the pupils' rate of progress. However, inaccurate assessments by teachers do not provide reliable information about the performance of pupils, despite the introduction of a consistent tracking system.

Governance remains inadequate, although there have been changes since the last inspection that have helped to streamline the way governors' committees operate, especially in relation to monitoring the school's performance. New governors have joined who have key management skills they can bring to the school where these have been lacking in the past.

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

- Improve the quality of leadership at all levels. Ensure that information from data and monitoring is used rigorously to bring about demonstrable improvements. Ensure that self-evaluation focuses sharply on the impact of initiatives on achievement and standards – inadequate progress

External support

The LA has acted decisively to provide an action plan that is clearly focused and provides clear steps for school improvement. The legacy of high staff turnover has hindered the school's capacity to secure improvements and to raise standards. A satisfactory start has been made in bolstering the leadership of the school following the temporary appointment of two assistant

headteachers. This has helped the headteacher to distribute relevant tasks and responsibilities to the leadership team and to focus on implementing the LA's action plan. The plan provides clear success criteria aimed at raising standards and accelerating pupils' progress, but the school has not broken these down into manageable steps and needs further guidance on this through external advisers. Inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching and leadership that still cast doubt on the school's capacity to sustain improvements.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

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

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Additional Inspector