



16 January 2007

Mrs Margaret Windsor
The Acting Headteacher
Tower Bridge Primary School
Fair Street
Tower Bridge Road
London
SE1 2AE

Dear Mrs Windsor

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF TOWER BRIDGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit with David White, Additional Inspector, to your school on 10 and 11 January 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth 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 pupils' work and met with the acting and associate headteachers, members of staff, pupils, governors and representatives of the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, a new temporary teacher has begun work in the Year 5 class. There have also been several staff redundancies as part of a necessary re-structuring. The school continues to be led by an acting head and an associate head from the LA's central Southwark School Leaders' Team (SSLT).

Achievement and standards

The strategies introduced for raising standards, such as Big Writing and numeracy wizard, are now showing a notable positive impact. During this school year, most pupils are making good progress in numeracy and writing. Effective tracking of each individual's progress raises expectations and is having a positive impact on all pupils' attainment. However, standards remain well below average and, due to slow progress in previous years, overall achievement in Years 5 and 6 is still inadequate. Handwriting and presentation skills are improving. Some pupils have recently begun to use pens regularly and there are more who are ready for this. Pupils with learning disabilities and difficulties and those for whom English is not their first language are now making good progress in numeracy and literacy as a result of the strong support they are receiving in lessons.

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

- Improve standards and the rate of progress made by pupils in Key Stage 2 – satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

Most pupils enjoy learning and are keen to make progress. Behaviour in lessons continues to improve but, as at the last monitoring inspection, pupils become restless where teaching is less engaging. They can be noisy when moving around the school. The use of talking pairs in lessons enables pupils to be more active thinkers and help one another. Well-structured basic skills lessons at the start of each day help pupils gain important skills they will need in later life. The quality of assemblies continues to vary between inadequate and good, making an inconsistent contribution to pupils' personal development. As in lessons, behaviour deteriorates when these are not sufficiently stimulating. There has been a fairly high number of temporary exclusions during the autumn, all for boys.

The more robust procedures to avoid pupils' absence, which began before the last monitoring visit, are now having a clear positive impact. Attendance rates during the autumn term were slightly above the national averages, which represents a significant improvement, although there has been a drop at the beginning of the new term. Most pupils are getting to school on time. The continued hard work of the staff and the increasing involvement of parents have contributed to the improvement.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2005, and modified at the monitoring inspection in October 2006:

- Reduce the high levels of absence and improve punctuality – good progress

Quality of provision

Improvements to teaching have continued since the last monitoring inspection. Many lessons are good, although some remain inadequate. The use of interactive whiteboards is good across the school and has a positive impact on the pupils' motivation and learning. The curriculum continues to develop but there is still much to do to improve the content and excitement in foundation subjects, as well as the use of the local environment. The specialist provision for science is satisfactory.

In most lessons, teachers successfully encourage pupils to join in actively. However, in some lessons teachers dominate or talk too loudly and pupils become restless and sometimes too noisy. This limits their opportunities for high quality speaking, which is a pity as this is an issue rightly identified as an area for development. Teaching assistants continue to improve their support for pupils, particularly those with learning disabilities and difficulties. In Year 6, the improvements in teaching and learning persist with the teacher skilfully increasing the pupils' knowledge and understanding through high expectations of work and behaviour. In Year 5, teaching has also improved but this class is recovering from a difficult start to the year and the situation remains fragile. In this year group, some pupils demonstrate poor attitudes to learning at times and can become silly.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in KS2 – satisfactory progress, though there remains further work to be done, particularly in Year 5

Leadership and management

The headteachers have continued to provide very strong and purposeful leadership, which has led directly to the improved provision and pupils' progress. The three key improvement priorities in the last monitoring letter have all been addressed very well and the most significant weaknesses dealt with. School self-evaluation continues to be accurate and supports specific

improvements well. Staff training is well planned to meet current priorities and parents have better opportunities to become involved with the school. The action plan has been appropriately revised. With the support of the LA and governors, staffing issues, including the very sensitive issue of redundancies, have been managed impeccably. Morale has been maintained and there has been only minimal disruption to pupils' learning.

The management of provision for pupils with learning difficulties, and those for whom English is an additional language, is now consistently effective. Phase leaders are highly committed and very effective in managing the headteachers' initiatives within their teams. This leads to excellent consistency in practice across the school in many areas. These staff also have the scope to provide some direction in the core subjects. However, as at the last monitoring visit, the leadership of the broader curriculum remains weaker, and the value for money and efficiency of the large senior management team continues to need evaluation. Overall, the school relies strongly on the leadership provided by the temporary headteachers and, despite the strong potential of the phase leaders, does not have sufficient internal leadership capacity to continue its journey of improvement independently.

The governing body has improved markedly in response to the challenges of previous monitoring letters. All vacancies have been filled, including two new members from the staff of the LA and local primary care trust. The new governors know the community well and rightly see the importance of the neighbourhood and the exciting local environment to the school. Although still at an early stage, it is now possible for the governing body as a whole to take a more strategic view. The committee structure has been improved to meet the school's current needs and monitor progress better. Governors are well aware of the need to build up their own capacity, and the school's internal leadership capacity, to take more responsibility back from the LA. To this end, suitable strategic plans are in place for the appointment of a new headteacher and, following that, a permanent deputy.

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
- Strengthen and develop the roles of co-ordinators so that they contribute more effectively to raising standards – good progress in core subjects but still inadequate in foundation subjects
- Develop the role of the governing body so that they are more involved in monitoring the effectiveness of the school – good progress

- Develop rigorous systems of self-evaluation, and ensure that these are sharply focused on standards and achievement – good progress; this issue is now dealt with and will not be specifically judged at the next monitoring visit

External support

LA support has continued to improve and is now very good. It is brokered and managed effectively by the link adviser. This assists the school in many areas, including self-evaluation, early years, governance, the development of teaching and personnel management. Support from the education welfare service has improved significantly since the last monitoring visit and is instrumental in promoting the improvements in attendance which need to be sustained. The LA is aware that its support, including the provision of the headteachers, needs to be trimmed down in a carefully planned way so that the school can take back more responsibility over time.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

The school continues to require special measures.

Priorities for further improvement

- Build further the capacity of the school's permanent staff, and the governing body, so that the current improvements can be sustained and developed in the future; this will become an identified area for evaluation at the next monitoring visit within the leadership and management section.
- Ensure that, when an appointment is made, the induction process for the new headteacher is robust.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Southwark.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
HM Inspector