



The Headteacher  
Mr H Kennedy  
Black Horse Hill Junior School  
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West Kirby  
Wirral  
Merseyside  
CH48 6DR

8 February 2007

Dear Mr Kennedy

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BLACK HORSE HILL JUNIOR SCHOOL

### Introduction

Following my visit with Chris Griffin, Additional Inspector, to your school on 6 and 7 February 2007 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 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 met with the headteacher, a group of pupils, the chair of governors, a representative from the local authority (LA) and nominated staff, including the coordinator for special educational needs. Informal discussions were also held with other pupils and staff.

### Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection staffing has remained stable at the school.

## Achievement and standards

In the 2006 statutory assessments at the end of Key Stage 2, the results attained by pupils were broadly average in English and science and well above average in mathematics. The progress which pupils made in Key Stage 2 was well below average, although there was some improvement compared to that made in 2005. In all three core subjects the progress made by pupils was significantly below average, although pupils achieved better in mathematics and science than they did in 2005. However, achievement in English declined slightly. The school has identified appropriately pupils' writing as an area for development and has taken steps to improve this. Pupils entitled to free school meals made good progress. Most learners with learning disabilities and/or disabilities made satisfactory progress and some made good progress. More able boys did not achieve as well as they could have.

Overall most pupils are making satisfactory progress in lessons and some are making good progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress due to the good, targeted support that they receive from teaching assistants.

The school tracks carefully the progress of individual pupils in the core subjects. Targets have been set for each individual to achieve by the end of the academic year. Progress towards these targets is regularly checked and where pupils are identified as falling behind appropriate action is taken. The progress of year groups is also monitored. As a result the school has a clear view of how both individuals and year groups are performing and of where underperformance lies. Assessment information in the core subjects is carefully analysed and used to set precise year group targets for pupils to achieve by the end of Key Stage 2. These targets have been amended in the light of additional data to provide a greater level of challenge. Progress towards them is now carefully and regularly monitored.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2005

- Keep a careful and more accurate track of pupils' progress so that more precise targets can be set for each year group - good progress.

## Personal development and well-being

Attendance is good and pupils enjoy school. Many pupils take responsibility by helping others. They behave sensibly and the atmosphere around school is calm and orderly. For example, during a 'wet weather' break pupils busied

themselves in classrooms on activities of their choice in a mature and trustworthy way. In lessons, pupils' attitudes to work vary. In the best lessons they are very well motivated, concentrate hard and work independently. Awareness of their academic targets contributes to this motivation. One pupil commented that, 'it helps me to have something to aim for'. This focused attitude to work and improvement is consistently evident among Year 6 pupils. However, in some lessons, weaknesses in pupils' concentration impede the rate of progress and the pace of learning.

### Quality of provision

Most of the lessons observed during the inspection were satisfactory and some were good. No inadequate teaching was observed. The proportion of lessons that was good has increased since the previous monitoring inspection, reflecting a gradual but secure improvement. Teachers have worked hard to put into practice key aspects of the national Intensifying Support Programme (ISP) which is designed to improve teaching, learning and standards. Consistently effective features in lessons include the sharing of clear learning objectives, detailed planning and a good range of learning activities. Work is matched consistently to pupils' abilities and is providing challenge for learners. New strategies are now well established. For example, the recently introduced 'learning walls' are well used to reinforce specific points of learning. However, good attitudes to learning are not always evident. In some lessons, noise levels are too high. Some pupils do not listen carefully enough and are too easily distracted. Their response to teachers' instructions is too slow, so that the transition to the next activity can take too long.

The school's strong focus on assessment data and the need to improve achievement has meant that teachers of younger pupils are developing a better understanding of the standards expected by the end of the Key Stage. This stronger awareness is enabling staff to better plan strategies that raise achievement. Since the previous monitoring visit the school has launched an effective initiative to improve the assessment of pupils' writing. School-based and external support is helping teachers to make more reliable and consistent assessments. For example, assessments in the 'Big Write' books are accurate and based on National Curriculum levels. Marking includes helpful comments about targets for improvement, although it does not comment frequently enough on what pupils are doing well.

Assessment information is now being used more effectively to plan work that better matches the different needs of pupils. Planning for English and

mathematics lessons consistently makes provision for different levels of ability. This is also the case when pupils are taught in ability sets. This improved level of planning was also observed in a religious education lesson. The school has made good use of assessment data to identify targets to improve learning across the school. For example, one target is to improve writing through better use of punctuation. Pupils in all years are aware of these targets and their importance.

Satisfactory progress has been made in providing more opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills. A prominent display board shows how problem-solving skills can be applied. New resources have been purchased, including a set of computer programs for use with interactive whiteboards. These programs capture pupils' attention and motivate them. Whilst problem-solving activities feature strongly in mathematics lessons they are less prominent in other subject areas. As yet, there is no portfolio of exemplary suggestions on how to apply mathematical skills in other curriculum areas. The school intends to address this.

Pupils' expectations of what they can achieve have been strongly raised. Most are aware of the National Curriculum level they are working at in mathematics and literacy and of the levels they are working towards. Informative displays enable pupils to see examples of levelled work to which they can aspire in writing and mathematics. All pupils receive weekly targets for mathematics and literacy which they evaluate at the end of each week. Whilst there is some inconsistency in how these are evaluated, pupils report that the targets help them to improve their work. Discussions about the school's high expectations for pupils' work have been held in assemblies and with the school council. Pupils have also been encouraged to discuss their targets with their parents.

Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve have been increased through the use of weekly annual targets for pupils and greater familiarity with assessment data. Pupils' progress towards their annual targets are analysed each term and reasons for underperformance are discussed with staff. Meetings, linked to the ISP, have been held to raise the awareness of staff of the work which can be expected from pupils. Demonstration lessons have been taught by a science teacher from a local secondary school. One teacher has visited a local school to observe and discuss good practice. Timely plans exist to enable all teachers to visit two other local schools for the same purpose. However, there is some variation in teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour and of what constitutes acceptable noise levels in lessons. In some lessons the level of noise distracts pupils and on occasion leads to some low-level misbehaviour. Consequently, this slows the rate of learning.

The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is carefully tracked by the school. These pupils are well supported by trained teaching assistants and targeted intervention strategies. Helpful reminders of appropriate national curriculum levels, and what pupils need to do to achieve them, are usefully displayed in the rooms where intervention strategies are taught.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2005

- Improving the teachers' expertise in the use of assessment so that all have a clear idea of the levels that pupils attain – good progress.
- Using the information from assessments to plan work which is more exactly matched to pupils' learning needs – good progress.
- Increasing pupils' opportunities to apply their mathematical skills to solve problems – satisfactory progress.
- Raising pupils' and teachers' expectations of pupils' progress – good progress.

## Leadership and management

The headteacher has maintained the school's relentless focus on the need to raise standards and the achievement of pupils. He continues to provide clear direction for the school in its drive for improvement. Expectations of what pupils can achieve have been raised. The headteacher has a good understanding of the strengths of teaching and of where further improvement is required. He has rightly identified that the sustained improvement of teaching is key to raising achievement. He is well supported by the senior leadership team which is similarly focused on school improvement.

Issues identified during the last monitoring inspection have been satisfactorily addressed. Responsibility for the monitoring of teaching has been extended to include the deputy headteacher. All staff have been observed teaching literacy last term and points for improvement have been shared with them. There are apt plans to train and include another member of the leadership team in classroom monitoring. Checking of the school's work is more robust. Recently, it has been sharply focused on particular aspects of teaching, such as how well work was matched to pupils' needs. This has contributed to the marked improvement of this aspect of teaching. Appropriate steps have been taken to increase the proportion of good teaching, such as support for the introduction of the ISP.

The carefully considered introduction of the 'Big Write' system has enhanced teachers' expertise in the use of assessment. It is also helping to improve standards in writing. The timetable has been reviewed and changed in order to provide more time for afternoon literacy sessions. The headteacher has held useful discussions with pupils to ascertain the depth of their understanding of their targets and has acted on the information this has yielded. This has contributed to the greater understanding by pupils of targets and the levels they are working to. Last year's school improvement plan has been evaluated and this year's plan revised. Areas for improvement are more fully evaluated, although there is scope for greater clarity. Full advantage has been taken of external support. The school has embraced the ISP and the positive approach by staff to this initiative has contributed to the growing proportion of good teaching.

Governors are supportive and more challenging of the headteacher. A committee monitors the progress the school is making on the areas identified for improvement. Governors are kept informed of the school's progress in raising achievement and in meeting its targets.

#### External support

The LA is providing good support for the school. LA officers visit the school regularly to offer advice and to monitor the school's progress. It has funded and led the ISP. Consultants from the LA have led staff meetings on improving teaching. The LA has provided additional resources to enable monitoring of teaching to be extended and for visits to other schools to observe good practice in teaching to take place. The school has good links with a number of local secondary schools.

#### Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to increase the proportion of good teaching.

- Ensure that expectations of pupil behaviour in class are consistently high in order that the pace of learning is not impeded.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael McIlroy  
H M Inspector