



1 March 2007

Mrs Jane Gornell  
Acting Headteacher  
Old Hall Drive Primary School  
Old Hall Road  
Gorton  
Manchester  
M18 7FU

Dear Mrs Gornell

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF OLD HALL DRIVE PRIMARY SCHOOL

### Introduction

Following my visit with Ron Bulman and Jon Lovgreen, Additional Inspectors, and Christine Graham, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 27 and 28 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 February 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, visited 20 lessons or part lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, the full leadership team, governors, administrative staff and representatives from the local authority.

### Context

Since the previous monitoring visit the substantive headteacher and deputy headteacher, both of whom have been on long-term sickness leave, have resigned. Procedures for the appointment of new postholders have been set in motion. The current senior management team, the acting headteacher and

two assistant headteachers, remain as temporary appointments covered by secondees from elsewhere in the local authority. In addition, three further members of the teaching staff have resigned.

## Achievement and standards

Standards are improving. They are still below national averages across Key Stage 2, but in Key Stage 1 they are edging towards the average. Importantly, there are clear signs of improving rates of progress for some pupils, especially in reading. As a result, the school has raised its sights and its target for the percentage of pupils gaining Level 4 and above in English to 65%, the threshold below which the government requires no primary school to fall, and in mathematics to 67%.

Since the last inspection, pupils in all classes have been grouped according to reading ages and now benefit from better organised guided reading sessions and additional support according to need. Pupils whose reading ages are below their chronological ages receive daily instruction and support; those with more severe needs receive additional one-to-one help. Those whose reading ages are around their chronological age or above receive less intensive support, but still have guided reading sessions two or three times a week. In order to facilitate this, the school has had to review the deployment of teaching assistants, train them to undertake the sessions and revise all timetables. The impact of all this is clear to see. Pupils are beginning to enjoy reading and to gain success in it. Progress is most obvious in Key Stage 1, where the more able pupils are now reading books at more appropriate levels of difficulty for them and their rates of progress are accelerating. The less able pupils though are not making as much progress as they could be and this is due to two factors:

1. there are too few books from the earliest part of the school's reading scheme to enable the pupils to practise reading a volume of easy books at the same level
2. reading is not taught rigorously enough in Reception.

In Key Stage 2, teachers report a very positive impact of the new strategy for guided reading overall, but lesson observations revealed that in Years 3 and 4, a handful of pupils are finding the tighter work ethic, and the self-discipline required in the sessions, difficult to conform to. However, peer pressure is beginning to exert a positive influence and in one session observed a pupil complained to the teacher that another was stopping him from reading.

Across the school, pupils' writing is improving. The greatest gains are being made in Key Stage 1 and Year 6. In Key Stage 1, the tighter focus on pupils gaining phonic knowledge and learning high frequency words is apparent in their books. They are writing more and at longer length; they are more

willing to 'have a go' at spelling and try more difficult vocabulary. In Key Stage 2, the sharper focus on assessing pupils' writing is beginning to pay dividends: they too are producing more and there is clear evidence of improvement over time in their books. However, the rigour of marking and assessment is patchy in Key Stage 2 and this means that not all pupils are making as much progress as they could.

On this visit a wider range of subject lessons was observed, including information and communication technology, science and mathematics. Standards in the lessons observed were mixed, but at best were average.

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

- Raise standards and improve progress for all groups of pupils – good progress

### Personal development and well-being

The school has an extensive range of systems and strategies which stress to pupils and their families the importance of regular and prompt school attendance. Expectations are high, and attendance, while remaining below average, is improving and for the second successive term is significantly better than that for the comparable period twelve months ago. Arrangements for teachers meeting pupils as they arrive on the premises have improved and are appreciated by parents. Careful records are kept and used, for instance to prioritise first-day absence phone calls, and for decisions about letters home, attendance clinics and contracts. A weakness has been inconsistent messages to teachers and families about cut-off times for being late, or when being very late constitutes an absence. The school accepts that clarity of message and consistency of application are vital to the success of raising expectations about attendance and punctuality. The late signing-in book, too, is not laid out in such a fashion as to enable all concerned to see what the pattern and trend of lateness is.

Punctuality is improving. Families show greater urgency as school start time approaches. Fewer pupils are late, and the degree of lateness is less. Once inside the building pupils go to classes promptly and settle into school routine quickly. However, a small minority of parents who casually stroll to school late continue to set poor rôle models for pupils.

Communication with parents is regular, clear and of good quality. A revised, well presented prospectus has been produced, as has a letter to each home about the child's reading age and strategies for school and home to pursue to improve it. These are examples of how the school is willing to analyse areas of work which need improvement and to take swift action to remedy them.

Behaviour is good, both in lessons and around school. This is reflected in the absence of any exclusions since the start of the school year – a contrast to previous years. While making very clear what behaviour standards are expected, the school is much more willing to work with pupils and their families to try to remedy problems. In lessons, pupils are sensible and thoughtful, and most are increasingly able to concentrate over longer periods. This is because the quality of teaching has improved. Pupils show respect to teachers and each other, and are increasingly willing and able to join in organised breaktime activities. Outside behaviour at lunchtime is satisfactory. The school has successfully increased the range of activities and the quality of supervision at both breaktime and lunchtime.

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

- Continue to work with pupils, their parents and carers to improve attendance – good progress

#### Quality of provision

Improvement in the quality of teaching and learning has been satisfactory, but it remains variable between subjects and year groups. Of 20 lessons or part lessons observed on this visit none was unsatisfactory and eight were good or better.

There is now therefore much good, stimulating and engaging teaching, and that which is satisfactory is beginning to involve more pupils actively, as is needed to improve the school's overall effectiveness. The teaching of phonics is more rigorous now in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 and this is evident in pupils' written work. The teaching of literacy and speaking and listening, however, is not structured enough in the Foundation Stage, and insufficient emphasis is placed on developing early reading. There are not enough early reading scheme books and related resources to improve the rate of pupils' reading progress. Similarly, In Key Stage 2, the supply of reading books across the full range of reading ages is woefully inadequate, as is the library stock generally. All this reflects years of underinvestment in the teaching of reading in the school, a legacy inherited by the current acting headteacher.

Teaching assistants are still being used effectively and make good active contributions to many lessons. This is particularly the case in the revised guided reading groups, where the school-wide planning and methodology have raised the skill level of teaching assistants and introduced rigour and consistency to the process. However, the deployment of teaching assistants on their own to lower-attaining groups, such as the literacy groups in Key

Stage 2, is sometimes less effective, especially when they have not been involved in the planning of those lessons. The school needs to monitor this short-term strategy very carefully.

In the more successful lessons, starters are used to set specific and challenging targets. Resources, including interactive whiteboards, are often used skilfully, although their use for modelling handwriting is less appropriate. Teachers give due attention to the range of attainment and learning preferences in the group. A good balance of teacher-led and independent activities keeps classes busy and productive.

In contrast, the satisfactory lessons still reveal some of the shortcomings highlighted on previous visits: marking of pupils' work not being kept up to date so persistent errors and misunderstandings are not tackled immediately; gaps in teachers' subject knowledge and skill revealed through missed opportunities to develop pupils' thinking or correct errors.

A common thread is some teachers' lack of understanding of what is meant by 'high expectations' and how this presents itself across the school. These teachers do not understand clearly enough that their own attention to detail, and their requiring pupils to reproduce what they have been taught correctly and consistently across all their work, is having high expectations, and it raises standards. An example of this is handwriting: the teachers are struggling to get a consistent level of satisfactory handwriting across the school. A look in some classrooms and scrutiny of some books reveal that, despite the newly introduced handwriting sessions and the focus on presentation, other hidden messages are being transmitted to pupils. Display boards contain cut-out labels with incorrectly sized upper and lower case letters; in one room, the days of the week are presented all in upper case letters; several Key Stage 2 teachers do not use cursive script when they write on the board; most teachers struggle to write well on interactive whiteboards when they also have traditional whiteboards or flipcharts in their rooms better suited to the task. Pupils in Reception are required to sign in, but no adult watches whether they are correctly forming the letters of their name. Older pupils are allowed to write partly in cursive script and partly in print, often switching between the two forms in a word or a sentence. This all gives a different message to pupils to that which the school thinks it is promoting.

The school's recent drive to develop a wide-ranging series of assessment methods is evident in planning documents and in most lessons but not always in pupils' books, where marking is still irregular. The sharper match between assessment and lesson planning is becoming increasingly effective and pupils are making better progress in lessons as a result.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning ensuring that teachers challenge their pupils realistically and have high expectations of what they can achieve – satisfactory progress

### Leadership and management

The acting headteacher continues to provide good, strong leadership and direction for the school. She is quietly determined in her approach and manner and ensures a persistent focus on raising standards and the quality of teaching. She is not afraid to take difficult staffing decisions in her drive to move the school forward and makes very explicit to staff what is required of them. She has established a very good working relationship with her two assistant headteachers and together they make a powerful team. Under its leadership and direction, the school clearly now has the capacity to improve. However, this team is not substantive and therefore the leadership and management of the school are still not secure.

A significant amount of progress has been made since the last inspection on monitoring the school's performance. Much of this has focused on ensuring the implementation of newly agreed methods for teaching speaking and listening, guided reading, teaching phonics and teaching and assessing writing. Lesson observation notes reveal that members of the senior management team are able to review lessons with some rigour and hold teachers to account. Pupil progress interviews were held at the end of last term with teachers across the school, including the Foundation Stage, to identify potentially underperforming pupils and provide additional support. Teaching groups have been reorganised following the resignation of three teachers in December 2006, and this has allowed the school to establish vertically grouped ability sets in mathematics and English. Scrutiny of pupils' writing has revealed weaknesses in teachers' expectations across the curriculum and this is being tackled. One assistant headteacher has continued to map the whole school's curricular provision and is now linking National Literacy Strategy requirements to foundation subjects.

Managers at the next level in the school continue to have their roles developed through the requirement that they plan, monitor and evaluate new schemes of work. They have been supported through this by the assistant headteacher and the humanities adviser from the local authority.

The much improved systems for assessing pupils' progress and the collection of this data are proving to be very powerful tools for improvement: the senior leaders are now analysing and questioning patterns and rates of progress made by groups and cohorts.

Additional tracking, for example of pupils of ethnic minority heritage and those with English as an additional language, is now established and a member of the teaching staff has been designated as coordinator for this activity.

The governors have made good progress in extending and executing their responsibilities in the management of the school. Several new members have added fresh insights and brought expertise to their role. They have gained much from their involvement in the school's development planning, as well as their partnership with the school's senior leadership team and the local authority. The governors' perception of the school's emerging strengths and their awareness of the work still required enable a productive dialogue with the headteacher. They execute their function as critical friend perceptively and with determination, for example recently challenging and readjusting attainment targets that they considered too low. The school appreciates the benefits of close personal knowledge and continuing hard work, evident in their frequent meetings and regular visits, which the governing body brings to the school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in February 2007:

- Ensure that leaders monitor and evaluate performance rigorously in all areas of school life and take effective action to make improvements where necessary – good progress
- Ensure that the governing body holds the school rigorously to account for its performance – good progress

#### External support

The local authority continues to provide good support in the form of consultant advice and training. However, the school has had a number of link advisers since it became a school causing concern. The latest, who was attached to the school in September 2006, is reported to be staying with the school for the next two or three years and this is what is needed.

#### Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – good

Second and subsequent visits – good

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that children are taught good reading, writing and speaking habits from an early age.
- Improve the teaching of early reading.
- Improve the reading stock and resources across the school.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Chief Education Officer for Manchester.

Yours sincerely

Angela Westington

H M Inspector