



20 March 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 Andrew Lyons and Roger Brown, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 8 and 9 March 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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, a sample of pupils work in every year, and met with the headteacher; the senior management team; the subject leaders for English and mathematics; the specialists for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language; a learning mentor; the chair of governors and representatives of the local authority (LA).

Context

There has been a reduction in the turnover of pupils and the number on roll has risen to 315. Staff absence through illness continues to limit development. Two classes were being taught by temporary teachers at the time of the visit.

Achievement and standards

Detailed analysis of the Year 6 test data for 2006, demonstrated that since Year 2, these pupils had made satisfactory progress in English and mathematics, but poor progress in science. Nevertheless, standards were still exceptionally low in all three subjects, particularly in English and science. Progress continues to be inconsistent through the school and between classes in the same year group because teaching is still too variable. The school is now using a reliable method for testing the pupils during the year to measure the progress they have made. Results, however, indicate inadequate progress overall, and a scrutiny of pupils' books confirms this. Progress in many classes is slow, particularly in English, where a significant minority in all year groups is not on course to meet their targets.

Standards in writing continue to be low and in many instances there is little written work in pupils' books. Although they write in a variety of styles for different audiences, they generally accomplish too little. Too much of the written work is brief and undeveloped and the overuse of worksheets hampers the development and consolidation of pupils' writing skills even further. Although the school is developing a greater emphasis on speaking and listening skills, in most of the lessons observed the pupils spent too much time listening to the teacher rather than being given the opportunity to extend their own spoken language. There were few occasions when they had the opportunity for, for example, purposeful paired discussion that would enable them to extend and develop their own ideas and language. There is, however, good practice, for example, where teaching builds on reading skills that could be usefully extended through the school.

There are indications of improvement in mathematics, thanks to targeted strategies, which are helping those pupils who are struggling most. The school has tackled one of the issues raised during the previous visit by ensuring that work in mathematics is matched to pupils' ability and needs rather than their age. However, the impact of these initiatives is not universal and many pupils are either not making progress or are regressing. The most recent assessments indicate that about a third of Year 6 pupils have not made the expected progress and that the proportion in this situation is even higher in Year 5.

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 are keen to talk to visitors and share their thoughts. Most are eager to learn. Behaviour is generally satisfactory around the school and in the playground but behaviour in lessons is too variable because it is dependant on the teachers' skills and expectations. With better systems in place, attendance has improved but still remains well below the national average. The sterling effort of the school to improve communication with parents by phoning on the first and third day of absence is only partially successful. The LA's education welfare service is now actively involved with the school and this has supported the slight improvement to the attendance rate. However, still there are too many families who do not ensure that their children need to attend school regularly. This is especially the case for those learners who have English as an additional language and require continuity of learning to make the best progress possible.

The school has properly ensured that all necessary statutory checks have been made in line with the latest guidance to ensure the safety and welfare of the pupils. The school council has worked well with the staff to improve facilities for pupils, such as the provision of playground activities at breaktimes. However, the absence of such things as playground markings for games limits the opportunity for pupils to take part in more stimulating play.

Quality of provision

While examples of good teaching were seen, the quality of teaching overall remains unsatisfactory. Expectations in many classes are too low and there is insufficient challenge to move pupils on rapidly enough, particularly the more able. Too few of the classrooms are a good learning environment where pupils' achievement is celebrated and models are provided of how they can improve their work. In the better lessons the teaching is vibrant and enthusiastic. Here, there are good relationships between pupils and with adults and an effective balance between challenge and support. In these lessons, the pace of progress is good because pupils are motivated, keen to learn and eager to please. These teachers constantly monitor what is going on in their class and change the pace and direction of lessons when necessary. A good range of resources is used well to move the learning on rapidly. However, this is still too rarely the case and much of the teaching remains mundane and unstimulating.

In many instances, too little account is taken of pupils' prior learning in order to match the tasks more closely to their needs. Pupils' independent learning skills are not developed well enough and consequently many are over-reliant on adults. Most are eager to learn but have not been helped to develop good

learning habits. Even where teaching is good in particular lessons, it is not always sustained as a good learning experience overall. Teachers' lesson planning varies in clarity and, in some cases, does not show clearly enough what pupils are to learn from the lesson. Teachers' use of questioning is developing and some are attempting to use more open-ended questions to promote thinking and develop reasoning. However, teachers tend to take the answer from those who volunteer rather than targeting their questions to ensure that all are involved. While some use efficient methods to assess pupils' learning, these strategies are not fully embedded and therefore opportunities and time are lost. Teaching assistants make a satisfactory contribution with the individuals and groups they are assigned to but are rarely used effectively at the beginning or end of lessons.

Provision for the pupils whose first language is not English is broadly satisfactory and they learn to use English adequately. This enables them to make sound progress but more challenging teaching, using a wider range of resources, would enable them to become more competent more rapidly. For example, pupils working in home language pairs, sharing their ideas and then presenting them in English would enable quicker intellectual development. Pupils with learning difficulties also make satisfactory progress. However, this is often through a limited range of approaches, most of which just provide a succession of repeated activities. Insufficient use is made of more interesting and challenging materials, such as relevant ICT programs or by allowing pupils to present their work in pairs.

Some work has been done by teachers in levelling pupils' writing and their understanding of National Curriculum levels is developing. However, more work is needed as teachers' assessments are not yet sufficiently accurate to give a clear view of standards and progress. Targets are set for pupils in English and mathematics but the school has rightly identified that these are not specific enough to give individual pupils guidance on what they need to do to improve. At present, too few pupils know their own targets, the level they are working at, or what they need to do to move on the next level. Satisfactory plans to improve target setting are currently being introduced. The marking of pupils' work is improving, particularly in English, where they are often given sound advice about how well they have done and what they need to do to improve.

The curriculum was satisfactory when the school was last visited, but with the removal of computer equipment from the information and communication technology (ICT) suite to create a new classroom, the school is now not able to meet statutory requirements. This means that curriculum provision is now inadequate. There has been almost no significant use of ICT by any of the pupils since the beginning of term. The LA plans to have new equipment installed by the beginning of the next term, but there is no firm date for this yet. By allocating more teaching time, the provision in science is now satisfactory.

The organisation of the foundation subjects is changing and evolving in an unplanned way. Some classes are spending blocks of time on subjects, such as religious education, whilst others are sticking to a weekly lesson. The headteacher is rightly pleased that staff are developing initiatives, but the unstructured approach means that the changes are not being tested rigorously or evaluated effectively by senior staff or subject leaders to measure their impact. In addition, the opportunity for joint planning of the curriculum in year groups is necessarily reduced. The school has a high quality dance studio on site, but this great resource is underused and empty for most of the day.

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 – inadequate progress

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the school remain inadequate. The senior leadership team is endeavouring to maintain the impetus of the changes that they have put in place. However, they have not devolved sufficient responsibility to subject leaders and teachers. The rationale behind this is to protect the teachers from overwork, but the effect has been to slow the pace and impact of these changes. Some teachers still see these initiatives as actions that have to be followed rather than developments they have ownership of and play an active part. A further outcome of this is that the senior leadership team is diverted from gaining a strategic oversight of what is happening in the school by the need to manage the minutiae of the developments. This is symptomatic of much of the change in the school, which is inconsistent and lacks urgency.

There are clear signs that some of the developments, such as the targeted interventions in mathematics, are beginning to have an impact. Most of the pupils that benefit from this support are making progress. Other ideas, such as the 'Big Writing' initiative are at a very early stage and although appearing promising, have had no measurable impact yet.

With the support of the LA, the school has introduced a good quality monitoring system which takes into account the assessments that the teachers make of the pupils. This is beginning to be used effectively by the leadership to evaluate where there are strengths and weaknesses. The system is not yet well enough established for the school to use this

information confidently or to identify any patterns of learning and achievement. Not enough attention is being paid to identifying issues that are common within classes or across the school.

The headteacher has continued to monitor the quality of lessons and has a satisfactory understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching. While there are improvements in the quality of these observations, not enough has been done following these to bring about the improvements in teaching that the school knows is needed. The interventions and strategies lack rigour.

The role of the governing body is continuing to develop. There is a full governing body in place and new governors are receiving training as to how they can challenge and support the school. The chair of governors continues to make regular visits and is keenly aware that progress needs to be quicker. The headteacher's reports to the governing body are no longer superficial. They now give better information to the governors to enable them to begin to evaluate the progress that is being made. The links with parents continue to be satisfactory.

The school's action plan has been revised and now provides a satisfactory basis for moving the school forward. The plan shows clearly how change is to be brought about, although the success criteria are still not sufficiently rigorous. However, in the light of the slow progress on improving teaching, targets for removing the shortcomings have been made far less challenging, rather than the plan demonstrating how the previously challenging targets would be reached. The school has begun to prepare the ground for a longer-term strategic plan but has yet to identify the key priorities to be tackled.

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 - inadequate 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 support provided by the LA by has proved to be unsatisfactory because it has not supported the effective raising of standards. The promised replacement of ICT equipment is long overdue and urgent action has now been put into train. Whilst most schools have some interactive whiteboards

that teachers can use to develop more interesting lessons, this school has only one. Teachers have attended training on the use of these and are keen to move forward but without the opportunity to develop this, their enthusiasm has once again been dampened.

The LA's plans are now falling behind schedule and the senior officers recognise that they need to be revised and support structures made more effective. The arrangements for support and monitoring are not robust enough to ensure improvement. The senior management team is getting insufficient support and challenge to develop the rigorous skills they need to improve the school. The LA intention to support the school through links with a partner school has again borne insufficient fruit and needs urgent review. A model of skilled school management needs to be studied and followed by the school. The target date for the removal of special measures has not been changed and is still overambitious given the school's circumstances and lack of progress since the last visit.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – inadequate

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve teaching by rigorous monitoring, especially of pupils' progress, and taking rapid and effective action to eliminate shortcomings.
- Improve leadership and management, particularly the delegation of responsibilities, to ensure that all in the school take a strong lead in bringing about rapid improvement.

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

Pat Cox
Additional Inspector