

23 July 2007

Mrs J Moore and Mr I Young
Associate Headteachers
East Ward Community Primary School
Willow Street
Bury
Lancashire
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Dear Mrs Moore and Mr Young

Special Measures: Monitoring Inspection of East Ward Community Primary School

Introduction

Following my visit with Chris Griffin, Additional Inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 July 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 September 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 and scrutinised documents and pupils' work. They met with the associate headteachers and other staff, groups of pupils, governors and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last monitoring visit in March 2007, the headteacher has resigned with effect from 31 August 2007 and has left the school. The governors anticipate appointing a replacement headteacher for January 2008. Two part-time associate headteachers have taken up post from June 2007 as joint interim leaders. Three other teachers have also resigned and are to be replaced by experienced teachers in September 2007.

Achievement and standards

Lesson observations and the school's assessment data show improvements in some pupils' progress. Pupils in Years 1 and 5, for example, show good signs of beginning to catch up on lost development. However, these improvements are inconsistent throughout the school. A high proportion of the pupils are still performing at lower levels than they are capable of reaching. Although recent action is improving teaching and learning, it has not yet eliminated the legacy of underachievement.

The school's preliminary results in the 2007 National Curriculum assessments and tests present a mixed picture. There were some significant improvements in the Year 2 results, particularly in writing. However, pupils' overall attainment is likely to be well below average. The Year 6 results were weak and lower than the school's 2006 scores, despite the fact that the 2007 pupils had performed better when they were in Year 2 than the 2006 pupils. Substantial numbers of pupils in the current Year 6 failed to reach the nationally expected levels and overall progress was inadequate. The school's own analysis shows that very few of these Year 6 pupils made any progress at all during their final year in school.

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

- Raise standards and achievement in English, mathematics and science across the school – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils' behaviour and attitudes continue to improve. Many pupils speak with greater enthusiasm about their school. They particularly note the increased range of activities, books and equipment. They welcome new opportunities to take on more responsibilities, such as becoming play-leaders. As one commented, 'Everything is better.' The recent arrangements for Year 6 pupils to spend more time sampling lessons in their secondary school have been very popular. These, and a range of other strategies, including stronger links with the education welfare service, are helping to sustain a rise in attendance.

Quality of provision

The associate headteachers have placed the highest priority on improving teaching and learning. The impact of their efforts is now gaining momentum. Teachers are working hard to improve their practice. Agreement on the essential ingredients of good lessons has been established and this is starting to influence work in the classrooms. Pupils' previously passive approach to learning is less evident. Most show interest in lessons and are keen to answer questions. They take an active part in discussions when working in pairs and groups. The increased pace of lessons has been noted by many pupils. They recognise that they are working harder and at a more challenging level. This reflects the ways that teachers and teaching assistants are raising their expectations of what the pupils can do. Teachers are making more use of whole-class

questioning to assess how well the pupils are learning, but this is sometimes rushed. Some questioning is probing and triggers good thinking, as seen during a mental mathematics activity.

The school's efforts to help teachers make better use of assessment data to support learning are well founded but are not yet making a consistent impact on learning. Teachers are using this information to plan a range of tasks for the pupils of different abilities in their classes. However, these tasks do not always match pupils' needs closely enough, particularly in providing enough challenge for the higher attainers. Pupils have a better understanding of some of their learning targets, such as improving punctuation. However, few can say how well they are doing in terms of attainment levels in the core subjects. Similarly, few are clear about what they need to do to reach the next level or meet their targets. The associate headteachers recognise the need to increase the impact of assessment. They are establishing a systematic assessment timetable so the pupils' short-term progress is tracked more closely and the information is acted on more rigorously. The recently revised marking policy sets out good guidance, but marking does not always inform the pupils about what they have done well and what they need to do to improve.

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

- Improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching, focusing on what children are learning and their rate of progress – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

After the slow start to improvements identified in the last monitoring visit, the associate headteachers have taken rapid and appropriately targeted action. They have set up strong systems for monitoring teaching and assessing pupils' achievements. This thorough monitoring has given a very clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Their evaluations have been accurate and have led to a series of well-targeted initiatives to tackle weaknesses and provide pupils with their entitlement. The measures have led to improvements in many aspects of teaching and a greater focus on how well the pupils are learning.

Revisions to the school's action plan have clarified what is necessary to bring about improvement. This is helping to ensure that all staff are working to a common purpose. There is stronger accountability at every level for the work done and a particular focus on promoting high quality. Effective training and increasingly good role models are also supporting these greater demands. There is a renewed feeling that success is achievable.

The associate headteachers have included all staff in their vision for the school, quickly establishing teamwork and a willingness to make improvements. This is seen in the enthusiastic way middle managers are approaching revisions and extensions of their responsibilities, including increased monitoring. They have greater understanding of

how the school needs to improve and the role they need to play. They are rising to the challenges and staff at all levels increasingly recognise that they can contribute to faster progress for every pupil.

Direct links have been established between members of the governing body and classes within the school. In the most successful instances, these have led to a number of visits with a clear framework for observations. The governors' improving understanding of the school's work is now contributing to the work of the monitoring group. The system also offers opportunities to target future observations on particular aspects of the school's improvements to aid governors' ability to hold the school to account.

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

- Improve the monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance, including the role of the governing body as critical friend – good.

External support

The LA has provided satisfactory support for the school. The introduction of the two associate headteachers has been particularly effective in halting the school's decline. Short-term measures to ensure the associate headteachers' continued support are well organised. There are satisfactory contingency plans if the governing body is unable to appoint a new headteacher in the first round of interviews.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures– inadequate.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- The issues identified in the September 2006 inspection remain the main priorities for the school.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tony Painter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "r".

Tony Painter
Additional Inspector