

26 June 2007

Mr James Shearly  
The Headteacher  
Houndsfield Primary School  
Ripon Road  
London  
N9 7RE

Dear Mr Shearly

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HOUNDSFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL

### Introduction

Following my visit with Anastasia Savva, Additional Inspector, Kathryn Taylor, Additional Inspector and Sibani Raychaudhuri, Additional Inspector, to your school on 19 and 20 June 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in February 2007.

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, members of the senior team and middle managers, the school council, the chair of governors and the school improvement partner.

### Context

The school has undergone a number of changes in staffing since the last inspection. Two teachers have left and a third person is leaving at the end of the summer term. Although the school has experienced difficulties with recruitment, the headteacher has successfully appointed three experienced primary specialists who will take up their posts at the start of the new academic year in September 2007. Currently, several temporary supply teachers cover the vacancies. The school also increased the number of learning support assistants by appointing seven more.

## Achievement and standards

Standards in literacy, numeracy and science are exceptionally low. Achievement for all pupils including those at the early stage of learning English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and disabilities remains inadequate. At the end of Year 6, standards have further declined. Assessment records and inspection evidence confirm that the results will be lower than the previous year's and the school will not reach its targets. Pupils' progress is generally slow across the school. However, the school's tracking data show some signs of improvement at the end of Year 2 where more pupils are now reaching the expected levels. This widespread underachievement is mainly linked to the inadequate teaching with low expectations for work and behaviour.

In lessons seen, there was insufficient emphasis on developing pupils' communication skills and introducing older pupils to different forms of writing. In addition, assessment is not rigorous enough to identify pupils' needs accurately and to set challenging targets. Consequently, work is not carefully matched to pupils' needs to enable them to achieve as well as they should. The senior leadership team and subject leaders recognise that until recently, few strategies were in place to arrest the decline in standards. Recent initiatives introduced by the school have yet to make an impact on achievement so that standards rise at the pace needed.

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

- increase pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding, especially in mathematics and science to raise standards – inadequate progress

## Personal development and well-being

This remains satisfactory. The school council takes its responsibilities seriously and has been involved in making decisions for improving the school playground and other aspects of school life. They feel valued and know that their views are listened to. They do report, however, that behavioural issues are not always dealt with as swiftly as they could be. Records of meetings confirm that there are behaviour issues in and around the school. During the inspection, there were inconsistencies in the way in which behaviour was managed, particularly in Key Stage 2. The school has plans to introduce A Place2Be next term and has launched systems such as a Worry Box, which enables pupils to voice their concerns. The nurture group manager has responded appropriately to pupils needs by setting up a mini-breakfast club and lunchtime activities to provide further care and support for them. Pupils report that they enjoy these sessions.

Attendance from April to mid-June, at 92.6%, although improving, remains below the national figures for primary schools. The school has a reasonable range of systems for monitoring attendance and following up absence by pupils; however, more could be done to improve punctuality and further increase attendance.

## Quality of provision

The overall quality of teaching remains inadequate and that in the Foundation Stage continues to be satisfactory. Teaching was satisfactory in seven lessons, unsatisfactory in five, and barely adequate in the remaining three lessons. No examples of good teaching were seen. Teaching and learning have not improved sufficiently since the last inspection to begin to raise standards, address underachievement and help pupils to catch up on lost ground. This is despite the support, coaching and training provided, as well as opportunities for all staff to observe good practice in other schools.

The teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving remain too low. Time is often wasted as lessons start late and the pace of teaching is too slow. Consequently pupils' learning and progress is limited. The content and delivery of many of the lessons is still not interesting enough to capture and sustain pupils' interests. As a result, some pupils' attention wanders and their behaviour deteriorates.

The quality, quantity and helpfulness of marking still vary greatly across the school and remain unsatisfactory. Some pupils' work is not marked at all. When teachers write comments in pupils' books these are often encouraging, but they fail to pinpoint weaknesses and mistakes in order to challenge and guide pupils about how to improve their work.

There have been some developments to teachers' planning, particularly in mathematics and English; but planning and teachers' subject knowledge in science remain weak. On occasions, especially in small focused group work, teaching assistants make a positive contribution to pupils' learning. However, in general teaching assistants have a limited impact on pupils' learning as they are not well deployed, and often spend more time helping to manage pupils' behaviour than to addressing their learning needs.

Staff have received further guidance on how to assess pupils' attainment accurately, but they still make little use of assessments to plan appropriate work and activities for different ability groups. Teachers also identify too many children as having learning and or behavioural difficulties without first considering whether it is weaknesses in the quality of teaching which is impacting on pupils' unsatisfactory behaviour and achievement. As yet subject leaders and senior leaders are not making sufficient use of the assessments data to check how well different classes, and groups of pupils are performing and progressing.

Whilst the school has begun to address weaknesses in the curriculum in relation to continuity and progression and better use of teaching and learning time, there is limited improvement in these areas, as initiatives are at early stages of development. For instance, in design and technology and art, schemes of work have been introduced focusing on progression in Years 1 and 4. These subjects, as well as geography, history and religious education have also been blocked in order to work

towards improved continuity and learning. Additionally, the school is taking action to develop pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding of scientific enquiry. Planning in Year 6 has included these elements. However, there has been limited progress on achievement as there are too many gaps to address. A phonics programme has recently been introduced from Reception to Year 5 to raise achievement and standards but at this stage, it is too early to evaluate the impact of the programme. The school recognises that there is still more to do as the work is not always pitched at the right level to match the interests and needs of all pupils. For example, the programme is well organised in Year 2 where the set work is carefully tailored to pupils' needs but this is not the case in Years 3 and 5.

The renewed timetable for Key Stage 1 does not make best use of focused teaching time. This was particularly evident during early morning activities. The head and deputy head teacher are aware of this. In the Foundation Stage, inconsistent use of assessment to improve planning is resulting in a lack of focus group challenge for different abilities in Reception. The lack of link between the outdoor curriculum to planned themes restricts the quality of outdoor learning opportunities. Child initiated activities are not adequately planned for and remain an issue since the last inspection.

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

- improve the quality of teaching. In particular, raise teachers' expectations and ensure they take full responsibility for the learning of all pupils in their class – inadequate progress
- review the curriculum, including the use of time available to teach it, to ensure pupils achieve as much as they can from year to year – inadequate progress

## Leadership and management

The newly appointed headteacher who had recently taken up the post before the last inspection has articulated his vision for the school to the staff. He clearly articulates the invasive problems that are preventing the school from making adequate progress. He has acted decisively to improve teaching and learning by taking action to increase the capacity of the school to improve provision by releasing and replacing some teachers. Discussions on what constitutes good teaching have taken place and a policy, yet to be ratified, is in place. He has sensibly exposed all members of staff to good practice by giving them the opportunity to visit successful schools; appropriate in-service training to equip staff with new skills is ongoing and procedures for increasing accountability are in place. Additionally, other support packages such as coaching have been provided and appropriate resources are being used to drive forward improvement. However, these initiatives, despite being communicated widely, have had too little impact on the quality of education provided by the school, primarily as the urgency behind the vision for school improvement is not yet fully understood by everyone. For example, assessment information is collected but is not used purposefully to identify and tackle underachievement or to drive planning and improvement. Furthermore, monitoring is not incisive or

systematic enough. The history of low results and lack of accountability has left a legacy of complacency. Consequently, teachers cannot yet distinguish the differences between good and satisfactory teaching and they are not yet conversant with using assessment to accelerate pupils' progress. Although teachers have evidence that the coaching has been beneficial, there is still much more to do to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The headteacher has had to focus on some rudimentary changes in order to begin establishing a new culture for learning. For instance, the job descriptions of the large management team have been re-written in order to spell out roles and responsibility and increase the capacity of the senior team. The needs of middle managers and the previous governors have been identified as requiring greater awareness of their duty. The headteacher's approach is piecemeal but systematic, enabling appropriate structures to be put into place in this large school faced with challenging circumstances. At this stage, members of the senior leadership team do not yet have a realistic picture of the task ahead and how their management and leadership skills are crucial to the school making further progress. The whole school approach to tackling the areas for improvement is now reflecting the views of teachers, in for example, the vision statement. However, at this stage, strategic planning lacks rigour in order to embed new ideas and increase the pace of change. Further improvements are planned for the start of September 2007.

The governing body has not been actively involved since April 2007. The minutes of the meetings indicate that they have not been holding the school to account for its progress, neither has it been involved in training and development. The ex-chair of governors continues to maintain contact with the school. However, in the absence of the governing body, and with the exception of the school improvement partner, the school has not had a regulating body to challenge it and sustain any form of improvement, however great or small for one term.

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

- develop the skills of senior leaders, managers and governors in monitoring and evaluating the school's work and its impact on pupils' achievements – inadequate progress

### External support

The school is receiving sound support from the local education authority (LA). Valued support from consultants has been given to the co-ordinators of literacy and mathematics and individual teachers. However, the intensive support programme has not yet had the desired impact on raising standards further and rightly; new ways of working and priorities have been identified for next term. Joint work and advice from the school improvement partners is helping to validate the leadership team's judgement on the work to date and to identify how much still needs to be done. Further joint observations with the school improvement partner are planned. The LA recognises that the governing body has not been functioning appropriately and is currently seeking to replace it with an interim executive board (IEB). The prolonged

procedures for setting up the IEB are further delaying the school's accountability to a critical, yet influential body.

The LA has prepared a clear statement of action, which covers the key areas for improvement, the progress expected and the systems that are in place for monitoring and evaluating progress. Ongoing financial support is enabling the school to gain access to a range of good quality resource materials. The LA has set up a joint working group with the school to monitor, evaluate and report on the progress against the Ofsted action plan. The impact of the support given is not yet evident.

## Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Newly qualified teachers may not yet be appointed.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure there is a consistent approach to engaging pupils' interest in their learning and managing low level disruption so that progress is sound or better.
- Improve the quality of teaching by developing the teachers': use of assessment for learning, individualised learning, resources and confidence to take risks in order to accelerate pupils' progress.
- The senior leaders should systematically review progress and modify actions as necessary against the school's action plan and use the findings to make further improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Enfield

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney  
H M Inspector