

27 November 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**

Following my visit with Kathryn Taylor, Additional Inspector, to your school on 20 and 21 November 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 February 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – inadequate

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report 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.

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

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF HOUNDSFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 20 and 21 November 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, middle and senior managers, the chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), the school council and a representative from the LA.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the school continues to face very challenging circumstances. Pupil mobility is still high and the retention of teachers has presented additional difficulties for the school. Two teachers, including the Early Years teacher who was appointed this term have resigned and a third member of staff is on long term absence. Three teachers remain on maternity leave. The headteacher has focused on stabilising the staff by appointing a number of agency staff who have remained in the school since the start of the term.

Achievement and standards

Standards were exceptionally low in the 2007 national curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 2. The 2007 results show further decline over three years in the proportion of pupils in Year 6 reaching or exceeding the expected levels for their age in English, mathematics and science. The school did not achieve the minimum set targets and achievement remains too low. Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 improved but results remain below average. Girls' achievement is lower than that of boys. Although pupils of Black African descent and the small numbers from a mixed heritage background achieved the best results, progress is too slow for pupils of all abilities and ethnic backgrounds, including those with a learning difficulty and/or disability. When lessons including those for the withdrawal literacy groups are well planned, pupils make sound or better progress. However, too often, pupils do not always catch up on lost grounds quickly enough because lessons are not pitched at the right level and some pupils are unclear about what they need to do. The introduction of some good strategies for teaching English and mathematics are helping to improve progress and the school reports that most pupils receiving this type of support make satisfactory or better progress. However, the full impact of these strategies have yet to be evaluated rigorously.

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

Personal development and well-being

Pupils are friendly and behaviour is satisfactory. The pupils display good attitudes and behaviour around the school is generally calm, with most pupils moving sensibly. The instances of boisterous behaviour that were seen were well managed by staff because they set high expectations for the pupils' behaviour and they respond positively to this. On a few occasions in lessons, the pupils with extreme behavioural

difficulties were managed well by the staff and this prevented the learning of others from being affected. Pupils feel safe and know that adults deal with difficult behaviour effectively. They like the good range of keep fit exercises. However, although they support healthy eating, they feel that they have not had the opportunity to put forward their choice of dishes and wish to be involved in discussions around their school meals.

Pupils say that they enjoy school, and during the monitoring visit, it was evident that they were relaxed, enjoyed good relationships with each other and worked well together when they had the opportunities to do so in lesson. The school councillors act as good ambassadors for the school and have the best interests of their peers

Attendance from September 2007 to the time of the inspection was 93.03%. This represents an improving trend. Strategies for addressing persistent absence, linked to extended holidays are appropriate, but have yet to be as effective as the school would like because absence rates remain too high.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching remains inadequate overall. Teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are satisfactory. Teaching was satisfactory in nine lessons, unsatisfactory in five, and barely adequate in a further three lessons. Good teaching was seen in one lesson. Teaching and learning have nevertheless shown some improvement since the last monitoring visit. For example, classroom organisation has improved; teachers more routinely share learning objectives with pupils, explore key vocabulary, and use information and communication technology (ICT) effectively when delivering lessons. Lessons start on time and the pace of teaching has generally improved. In the majority of lessons seen, teaching assistants made a positive contribution to pupils' learning. Relationships between staff and pupils are much improved and pupils are well managed, so that there is a positive learning environment across classes. Teachers are becoming more reflective. They more readily recognise and accept the weaknesses in their teaching and demonstrate a willingness to improve.

Where teaching is inadequate this is most often because it lacks pace and challenge, and the work planned is either pitched at too simple a level, or lacks content and depth. The lack of challenge arises more because teachers rely too heavily on published materials and commercial schemes of work, or because they do not have a secure knowledge of the National Curriculum and age-related expectations. The school council indicated that, '... in the best lessons, we have fun and work hard ...we want teaching to be fair in all classes...because sometimes I am bored...'

Staff have received further guidance on how to assess pupils' attainment accurately, but this is an area that still needs developing, as is the use of assessments to plan appropriate work and activities for different ability groups. Although there are pockets of good practice in teachers' marking, this remains inconsistent. It too often provides little feedback to pupils about how to improve, and some work is not marked at all. Teachers still do not routinely expect that they will have to mark all of the work that they set for pupils.

The school has received much external support from the local authority to improve the curriculum. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage has improved and is now satisfactory, providing more opportunities for outdoor learning and for children to choose activities. Better use is now made of the available teaching time in Key Stage 1. In particular, the phonics programme introduced last term is helping to raise achievement and standards, and the new scheme of work for mathematics is providing a starting point for teachers when they plan work for their own classes. However, the absence of detailed plans outlining what should be taught to each age group inhibits teachers' weekly planning. As a result, teachers have too little time to consider how they might make the curriculum more exciting, plan for different abilities and develop better links between subjects. However, subject leaders and the curriculum leader are working to develop curriculum outlines for each year group.

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.
- 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 satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The headteacher continues to provide sound direction for the school, based on the extensive support from the local authority. This highly effective support has increased the confidence of senior link managers, core team and phase leaders in the future. They readily talk about recent improvements, are reflective about their work and have a more direct hands-on approach. For instance, the school is beginning to use data to track pupils' progress, identify weaknesses and the next steps to improve learning. The managers now have a reasonable understanding of the requirements of school improvement and there is more ownership of the school improvement plan. Despite the varying levels of experience and expertise among the core and phase leaders, they are now committed to school improvement and have responded well to the work and training undertaken with the LA subject consultants. For example, they have been trained to monitor teaching and learning. Teachers now work together as a team and the re-organised work force show clear responsibilities and suitable accountabilities. However, these are not always explicit as the many tiers of reporting result in initiatives not being rigorously evaluated. Nevertheless, core team leaders have a reasonably good understanding of their accountability for teaching and learning, and the use of assessment to raise standards in the subjects they are responsible for managing.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the school has introduced more management structures. Targets for improvement have been agreed with the LA. These reflect the minimum targets which provide a basis for setting more challenging targets to raise standards. Performance management is in place and is helping to ensure that all staff maintain the focus on accelerating pupils' progress in order to reach the more challenging targets. However, the school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, though accurate in places, is not rigorous enough. For example, the school perceives that it has the capacity to improve without the local authority's support even though the quality of teaching remains weak and standards are

extremely low. The school has relied heavily on the LA to take a lead and has yet to work out how it will sustain the changes. Currently, there is too wide a variation in the effectiveness of phase leadership.

The headteacher is aware of the need to embed a culture of change and to move the school forward from a legacy of low expectations and inertia. A good range of initiatives have therefore been introduced and there is recognition that the quality of teaching needs to be given the highest priority. Currently, the school is working on many fronts and has set itself too many priorities that are affecting the pace of improvement to teaching and learning. There is therefore insufficient focus on what constitutes consistently good teaching and as yet, the internal programme for monitoring teaching and learning lacks urgency and neither has it been meaningfully evaluated. In addition, there is insufficient attention to identifying the impact of changes and the next steps to sustain improvements.

The turbulence in staffing is also having a negative effect on pupils' rate of progress, particularly as the temporary status of the agency staff does not bode well for future stability.

The new and very experienced governing body has a good knowledge of developments and has the capacity to hold the school to account for its performance. It asks the right questions to find the underlying cause of underperformance within the school. The governors have acted quickly to review statutory requirements and have drawn up a suitable plan with the LA to monitor and address the issues the school faces.

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 – senior managers have made adequate progress in relation to improving their practice. However, because the school continues to rely on the LA for support, progress overall is inadequate.

External support

The local authority continues to give very good support by monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the quality of provision. Additional resources have also been provided through allocating leading practitioners to work alongside middle and senior managers. Appropriate plans for enabling the school to stand alone have not yet been worked out at this stage as the school still requires strengthening and recent changes are being embedded.

Priorities for further improvement

- As a matter of urgency, focus more sharply on improving teaching and learning.
- Develop the capacity of middle and senior managers further so that they can sustain the changes for improvement.