

7 December 2007

Mr S Ashby
Acting Headteacher
Mill Hill Community Primary School
Crosby Road
Northallerton
North Yorkshire
DL6 1AE

Dear Mr Ashby

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF MILL HILL COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Liz Godman and Anthony Briggs, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 5 and 6 December 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 May 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may only be appointed with the agreement of the lead inspector.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services for North Yorkshire.

Yours sincerely

Mark Wilson
Lead Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF MILL HILL COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 5 and 6 December 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with key staff, including the headteacher designate, groups of pupils, members of the governing body, and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

The two part-time acting headteachers present at the last inspection have left. Since late September 2007 an acting headteacher seconded from a local partnership school has led the school. A temporary acting deputy headteacher, again on secondment, has been in post at the school for five weeks. A new permanent, full-time headteacher and deputy have been appointed. They are due to take up their posts in January 2008. One teacher in Years 3/4 left in November 2007. Temporary teachers are covering that position and a vacant post in Years 1/2. Concerns have been raised over a potential deficit budget.

Achievement and standards

Results from the 2007 national tests show that standards by the end of Key Stage 2 improved slightly overall upon those of 2006. While showing an improvement, these results continue the trend of inadequate achievement over the last few years. Concerns that the current Year 6 were almost one year behind in their learning at the beginning of September focused the school to respond more quickly to improve pupils' achievement. This in turn has led to improvements in classroom practice. Pupils' current work, as well as the school's assessment data, indicates that more pupils are making better progress than previously. However, achievement is still not good enough.

Tracking systems have been established to identify and respond to the pupils who are underachieving in English and mathematics. This has resulted in clearer expectations of the progress pupils should make each year in these subjects, although it is too early to judge the full impact of the systems on pupils' progress. In science such a system has only just been set up. There are support programmes to accelerate the progress of those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, standards for higher-attaining pupils in English, mathematics, and especially science, are still not good enough by the end of Year 6.

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

- Raise achievement and standards in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils enjoy coming to school and feel safe in a friendly community. Most pupils behave well in lessons and their attitudes towards learning have improved. Consequently, most are happy to learn and have a pride in their work. Pupils' attendance is good and they know how to lead a safe and healthy lifestyle. Opportunities are made for pupils to take positions of responsibility. However, pupils' basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology do not contribute sufficiently towards their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching has improved since the inspection in May 2007 and is beginning to secure better progress in pupils' learning. However, some of the positive features of teaching, found in upper Key Stage 2, including targeted activities to close gaps in pupils' understanding, are not yet consistent throughout the school. As at the last inspection, relationships continue to be strong. Recent improvements to assessment procedures mean that teachers have a clearer understanding of the range of levels at which pupils are working. However, the work provided in lessons is not always closely enough matched to what pupils have already learned and so tasks are either too easy or too difficult for some pupils. In a number of lessons, the more able pupils are not stretched enough, limiting the progress they make.

New strategies have been introduced to encourage pupils to work together and to think about what they have learned and find solutions to problems. Routines for independent work are not secure in every class. As a result, some pupils are too dependent upon adults for what they should do next. This interrupts the progress they or others in the class are able to make. In some lessons teachers talk for too long at the start and the explanations and organisation of tasks are too lengthy. In these lessons pupils become disinterested and the pace of learning slows. Occasionally the focus on managing behaviour inhibits progress in learning.

There is a more consistent approach to the marking of pupils' work. Pupils are given clear indications of the strengths in their work and how it can be improved. Pupils in upper Key Stage 2 assess their own and others' work accurately and this contributes to their understanding of the progress they are making. However, throughout the school, pupils are not always clear about how to improve their work. Tracking systems are giving teachers an improved understanding of pupils' attainment and progress, but they are too recent to contribute to better progress for all pupils.

Imaginative approaches to teaching enliven learning in some lessons, but this is inconsistent. An increased focus on literacy and numeracy has narrowed pupils' experiences of other subjects across the curriculum. This has limited their opportunities to apply and extend their skills in a variety of interesting contexts.

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

- Improve teaching, particularly by raising the level of challenge, especially for the more able pupils – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

In a very short space of time the acting headteacher has clarified the roles and responsibilities of senior and middle managers and has laid clear foundations for improvement. The senior leadership has been strengthened by the addition of an acting deputy headteacher. This means that the school has now had full-time senior leaders for almost a whole term. While this is an improvement to the stability of management, it is a temporary rather than a long-term solution. However, a new permanent experienced headteacher and a deputy headteacher have been appointed and are to take up their posts in January 2008. The transition arrangements for this are working well and the new headteacher has visited the school on several occasions to ensure that little time is wasted finding his feet in January.

The underachievement that has characterised the school's history has been analysed by the acting headteacher and staff are now starting to address it. The current acting headteacher has identified the strengths and weaknesses of the school in a self-evaluation document that accurately assesses the performance of the school.

As a result of the acting headteacher's astute leadership, subject leaders say that they are empowered and share a common purpose to improve. They are beginning to provide the impetus for change and are starting to apply strategies to hold their colleagues to account. There is an appropriate and increased focus on raising standards. Managers at all levels have a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and how their responsibilities relate to improving it. Plans for improvement have a tight focus and are driven by improving teaching and learning and raising standards. Support provided by the LA has been effective and has contributed well to improving teaching. Systems for tracking how well each pupil is doing in English and mathematics have improved.

The work of the governing body is improving. Governors are generally supportive but, as in the past, rely too much on reports from school leaders. However, the quality of the information they receive is more accurate and they now ask probing questions of school leaders. Many governors have undertaken additional training and feel more confident and knowledgeable about their roles. As a result, most realise that the achievement of pupils is a more important area to channel their efforts into than repairing the fabric of the building. A new strategic committee has been established and some governors are becoming more directly involved with the work of the school, finding out for themselves how things are going. Nevertheless, not all governors are fully aware of the seriousness of the school's position and, because of this lack of understanding, act as a barrier to achievement and progress.

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

- Ensure long-term stability in leadership and management in order to provide a secure foundation for improvement – satisfactory.

External support

The LA is providing a good level of support to the school. A full programme of specifically designed support has been provided for subject leaders and for the Foundation Stage. The LA's statement of action matches the school's improvement plan and includes support and challenge for all areas for improvement. Ongoing work through the Intensifying Support Programme is proving effective in building the confidence of staff and helping to raise pupils' achievement. Additional support from the partnership schools has also been very helpful. The LA has wisely planned to ensure that the change of headship is smooth, through the provision of extended support from the current acting headteacher.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that pupils experience a wider range of subjects to extend their skills and achievement and to stimulate their interest.