

Tribal Group
1-4 Portland
Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR
T 0845 123 6001
F 0845 123 6002

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



14 December 2007

Mr Christopher Russell
The Federation Principal
Barton Junior School
Barton Road
Dover
Kent
CT16 2ND

Dear Mr Russell

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BARTON JUNIOR SCHOOL

Following my visit with Robina Tomes and Barry Wood, 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 June 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 be appointed subject to the following qualifications: very careful placement to year and class group and well focused, skilled support and mentoring from staff with expertise within the federation.

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 Strategic Director of Education and Libraries for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Davies
Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF BARTON JUNIOR SCHOOL

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

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including lessons, scrutinised documents and pupils' work, and met with the federation principal, temporary head of school, advisory and assistant headteachers, curriculum leaders, a group of pupils, the chair and vice chair of governors and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The headteacher and deputy headteacher left in July 2007. An advisory headteacher took over the full leadership of the school at the start of this academic year, supported by an assistant headteacher seconded from another school. They led the school until early November and are contracted to do so until the end of December 2007.

On 5 November this year the school became part of the Dover Federation of the Arts. This federation contains three other schools – a secondary, a primary and a combined nursery and infant school. The federation has a single governing body that includes members from the school's now disbanded governing body and has placed a temporary head of school at Barton to work alongside the advisory headteacher for the remainder of this term. A substantive head of school has been appointed who will join the school in January 2008.

Achievement and standards

There are some early signs of increasing progress brought about by improvements to planning and assessment, and a much more positive climate for learning. Most pupils have moved on in their learning since September, with the strongest picture at Year 6. In some cases the progress of individual pupils has been rapid. Nevertheless, progress varies a great deal between, and within, year groups. Consequently, the rate of progress is as yet too inconsistent for pupils to make up for lost ground in the past and needs to accelerate to a much faster rate in all classes. Similar variation exists for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Standards remain well below average as a whole at Year 6, but relatively higher in English than mathematics.

National test results in 2007 for pupils in Year 6 reflected the low standards and inadequate achievement reported at the time of the last inspection. There was, however, some improvement to results in mathematics which indicated that this group of pupils had made broadly satisfactory progress in this subject. The school, therefore, has focused its attention primarily on improving English, where results had fallen, and on writing in particular. As a result, progress in writing has been relatively stronger this term than for reading and mathematics. As yet, mathematics has not received the same amount of development. However, in order to create a secure

foundation for accelerating progress further in this subject, teaching is focused on consolidating pupils' mathematical knowledge and understanding before moving on.

Personal development and well-being

Staff and pupils testify to the positive impact of improved behaviour on their everyday life at school. Discussion with pupils shows that they enjoy school and take a pride in being part of it. They report far fewer incidents of bullying and there have been no exclusions this term. These important improvements make for an orderly and positive environment and, importantly, disruptive behaviour is no longer a significant impediment to learning during lessons. Younger pupils are developing valuable independent working habits that will stand them in good stead as they move through the school. Older pupils have not developed these skills over time and this shortcoming tends to constrain their progress during activities when they are working alone or as part of a group.

The school has worked hard to improve attendance and it is now within sight of the national average. Nevertheless, there is still a minority of pupils whose attendance is below 90%. These pupils need to attend more regularly to ensure that they get the best from their education and develop the basic skills they will require at secondary school and in adult life.

Quality of provision

The school now has curriculum planning that adequately supports teaching and the progressive development of knowledge, skills and understanding. The move to single-age classes and the introduction of smaller teaching groups have also helped to make planning more straightforward. Staff are more confident in assessing pupils' attainment accurately and in tracking their progress, although their growing expertise is stronger in some subjects than others. These factors have started to lift teaching and learning. The quality of both is mostly satisfactory, and sometimes good, but still too variable to gain the consistent, secure and rapid progress needed to eradicate the effects of past underachievement and raise standards. Most emphasis has been placed on the development of the English curriculum and introducing the new national strategy for literacy. The school is aware that it must now give the same attention to developing mathematics.

There is a positive atmosphere in most lessons because of improvements to behaviour and its management. Pupils are aware they have learning targets, and some know what they are. Nevertheless, staff do not yet make full use of these targets for planning work, or for identifying criteria to enable them to judge what pupils have learned. Activities to improve mental mathematics, and the use of drama and computerised whiteboards, have introduced a wider range of teaching strategies into some lessons that pupils enjoy. When lessons move at brisk pace and pupils take an active part, rather than just sit and listen, progress is good. It is also good when learning is broken down in to small steps and adapted to pupils' needs, when misunderstanding is carefully corrected and tasks are explained precisely. These important features now need to be much more widespread. As yet, work is not always accurately matched to pupils' abilities or challenging enough and, too

frequently, activities lack excitement and interest or the chance to develop independent learning skills. When elements such as these are present, pupils' progress slows and is occasionally inadequate.

Changes to the management of behaviour have particularly strengthened the quality of the school's pastoral care, guidance and support, such that pupils now feel much safer at school. Senior staff have played a major role in promoting a positive approach and gained a large degree of consistency amongst staff. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties is well structured. Those in need of extra support have been identified, but small group intervention activities have yet to be fully implemented because there has not been a full complement of teaching assistants to support them. Growing confidence in assessing pupils' attainment, and external support to moderate their accuracy, now means that the most recently gathered data will provide a more secure basis for judging pupils' progress next term.

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

- improve the quality of teaching, learning and the curriculum so that they are consistently good throughout the school in order to raise standards, accelerate pupils' progress, eliminate the minority of unacceptable behaviour and overcome underachievement amongst pupils of all abilities – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

A much more stable complement of teachers has given staff members the opportunity to come together and grow as an increasingly confident team. The hard work of senior leaders over this period has built some valuable foundations for the federation to build on in the future. Securing an improved curriculum, particularly in English, gaining more accurate assessment information, and considerably reducing disruptive behaviour have been key elements in the school's journey so far. Staff say that positive feedback about their work has raised morale. The school is now in a transitional phase while it awaits the arrival of the new head of school and settles into a new phase as part of the federation. Developments are at an early stage and some members of staff feel a degree of anxiety and uncertainty. The new head is building his knowledge of the school and helping to ease change through frequent visits. Members of the single governing body have also visited to familiarise themselves with the school and its challenges.

Federation leaders already have a successful track record of support for schools in difficulty. Indeed, joining the federation has opened up a wide range of resources and expertise on which the school can draw to improve its effectiveness. First steps have been taken to improve the school's environment and lift self esteem. For example, the reception area is newly decorated and bright and welcoming to parents and visitors. Using the federation's specialist expertise in art and design, pupils have produced art work of a high quality. Those in Year 6 are benefiting from the secondary school's science facilities. Plans are also in place to appoint study support managers next term who will work alongside teachers to strengthen the school's academic work. The leadership of mathematics has been temporarily placed so far. Similar arrangements are to continue into next term while the federation seeks a permanent appointment to this position.

The school has had a clear plan for improvement but, because of the change in the school's circumstances, this is now in need of urgent updating. Planning does not outline responsibilities at governor, federation and school level, or include how the school is to continue on its path of improvement within its new context. Small developmental steps now need to be mapped out for next term and beyond, most particularly for improving the quality of teaching and learning, so that pupils' progress moves on at a much faster pace.

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

- establish an effective senior leadership team and develop the management skills of teachers and governors to ensure a dynamic team approach to improving all aspects of the school's performance – satisfactory.

External support

The overall quality of the local authority's support has been satisfactory. The temporary appointment of the advisory and assistant headteachers has proved to be valuable in building a more positive learning environment and establishing a senior team with clear roles and responsibilities. The school's improvement partner has a good understanding of the school's progress to date. External support from advisory staff and skilled teachers has aided improvements to the curriculum, especially for English, and helped to build more secure assessment practices. Support has also started to build skills in the analysis and use of data and in monitoring provision. There have been regular reviews of the school's progress. However, the local authority's statement of action has yet to be reviewed and updated to reflect the school's current position as part of the federation. Within this new context, it needs to define clearly its support and responsibilities for the school during this important transitional period and up to the school's planned removal from special measures.

Priorities for further improvement

- Draw up an action plan that outlines key roles and responsibilities and clear incremental steps to move the school forward and demonstrate improvement, including sharply focused attention to lifting the quality of teaching and learning.
- Review and update the local authority's statement of action to reflect the school's current position as part of the federation and clearly define the authority's support and responsibilities for the school to ensure its removal from special measures.