

31 January 2008

Mrs Alison Bowden
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Dear Mrs Bowden

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF KINGSWAY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Ron Bulman, Additional Inspector, to your school on 29 and 30 January 2008, 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 March 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

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 Director of Education/Children's Services for Trafford.

Yours sincerely

Angela Westington
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF KINGSWAY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 29 and 30 January 2008

Evidence

Inspectors examined the school's work, observed 16 lessons or part lessons, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, members of the teaching staff, groups of pupils, governors, the associate headteacher and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the monitoring inspection in September 2007, the staffing disruption reported at that time has substantially diminished, although there have been further changes in staffing in the Year 1/2 class. At the time of the last inspection, four members of teaching and support staff were on long-term sick leave. The local authority anticipates that the staffing issues still facing the school will be resolved by the end of the current term.

Achievement and standards

The validated test results for 2007 show that in Key Stage 2, the major issue facing the school remains the persistent underperformance of the more able pupils, most of whom are not gaining the higher levels of which they are capable, especially in English and science. The school's results have steadily declined over recent years from its previous above average performance to one that is now broadly average, but variable across the subjects. Most of this decline is located in the much weaker performance of the more able pupils and the lack of the higher level result.

The work seen in pupils' books reflects this picture although with some exceptions. In Years 4 and 5/6, standards are rising as the teaching becomes progressively more accurately targeted and challenging. In these classes, pupils are writing more frequently, at length, across a range of subjects. The presentation of their work is better and the content is more closely aligned to the national literacy framework. As a result, pupils are learning more about the specific features of different genres and applying these features more regularly in their writing. Pupils' books also show that more attention has been paid in mathematics to work on data and data handling, as a result of the school's and local authority's audit of weaknesses in pupils' answers in tests.

In Key Stage 1, the validated results reveal a more mixed picture. Following some concerns raised about the validity of the reading scores, the local authority and school reassessed the current Year 3 pupils and found that the results stand. The 2007 figures show that pupils' performance in reading did improve but that writing scores fell significantly. Most acutely affected were boys and the most socially disadvantaged pupils. Mathematics results declined further on the previous year, bringing them down to the national figure. The pupils currently in Year 3 still bear the legacy of these weaknesses and are not making up lost ground quickly enough. The standards of knowledge in mathematics, although weak and partial, are better

than those in writing. Pupils display severe weaknesses in mental calculations and number operations and their writing remains considerably underdeveloped.

In the current Key Stage 1 (Year 1/2 class), standards have improved significantly since the recent appointment of the new teacher, but pupils, especially those in Year 2, are also revealing considerable and worrying gaps in their knowledge, particularly in mental calculation and operations. Their recall of number facts and understanding of early place value and simple multiplication, for example, are very weak. In contrast, there are promising signs of improvement in pupils' writing, with some of the Year 2 pupils now writing known stories at length, with reasonably consistent handwriting and letter formation, generally accurate spelling and some punctuation.

The 2007 Foundation Stage data shows that the children currently in Year 1 achieved around or just above the national figures in most areas, except for 'linking sounds to letters'. The data reveal that both boys and girls did less well compared to the national figure, but boys did particularly poorly. Boys also performed poorly on the early writing scale. These children, who are now in Year 1, have continued to have a disrupted education and the school knows that, as a matter of urgency, its focus needs to move to this age group.

The deputy headteacher has taken over responsibility for the combined Reception and Nursery classes and has introduced the 'Letters and Sounds' phonics programme across the Foundation Stage. The children are grouped by phonic ability and receive a daily phonics lesson. They are making good progress in acquiring new reading skills. The school has recognised that it now needs to consider expanding its early reading material to build upon the progress made by children and to extend the programme to Key Stage 1 and into Key Stage 2 where necessary.

Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are improving and gradually moving closer to those expected for the pupils' ages. Finished work appraised by the local authority consultant or on display around the school shows the high standards that the most adept pupils can achieve, for example in the use of graphics software for publicity leaflets and slide presentations. Some classes have lower standards because of the legacy of weak provision in recent years.

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

- Improve achievement and raise standards, particularly in Key Stage 2 – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Pupils enjoy coming to school and are astutely aware of the increased interest and engagement generated in many lessons. This is evident in improved attendance, as the school moves towards its target figure of 95%. Enthusiasm and involvement are present in lessons, especially when pupils take responsibility for their learning by modelling answers, using the interactive whiteboard or working in teams or pairs. Only occasionally do individual pupils show disaffection or let their attention drift. A spirit of healthy competition is evident in the popularity of the school's high-profile rewards system. Bright displays around the school reflect pupils' creativity and the

benefits many gain from joining in a good range of games, excursions and other extra-curricular activities. Pupils take pride in the various responsibilities they assume in school life, such as school council membership or leading the infants at play. The positions they hold are held in respect, and their good example contributes strongly to a busy and orderly atmosphere in school. The boredom displayed by some pupils on previous inspections was not evident during this inspection.

Quality of provision

Inspectors observed 16 lessons or part lessons. Of these, one was outstanding, five were good and the remainder were satisfactory. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed.

This profile of teaching is very much better than that observed on the first monitoring inspection and represents good progress since that time. The better teaching was observed consistently in Years 4 and 5/6. Relative weaknesses remain in Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2, where staffing issues have dominated and where the teaching has not yet tackled the gaps in pupils' knowledge.

Overall though, the picture is positive. Staff have worked hard to raise their game, and their expectations, about what constitutes good teaching; morale is higher among staff, and pupils are responding positively to the better pace and variety in lessons. There is much still to be done but the school has turned a corner by establishing a common sense of purpose and a will to bring about the required improvements.

The better lessons are conducted at a brisker pace, with a clear focus on what pupils are learning, and teachers' match of work to pupils' ability is sharper. The majority of lessons though were satisfactory. Some of these lessons are still dominated by over-lengthy teacher talk, leaving too little time for pupils to work on their own. Some group work is insufficiently focused on pupils' next steps in learning. In these instances, teachers make too little use of the levels of attainment that pupils have been assessed at, in order to ensure that the teaching accelerates pupils' learning. Even where marking is regular and conscientious, the advice to pupils about how to reach the next National Curriculum sub-level is inconsistent. Pupils in some classes, but not all, have targets for writing and there are no targets or references to levels in mathematics books.

Teachers' lesson planning, although much improved, is still too variable. The more able pupils are not sufficiently challenged and this remains a significant weakness in the provision. In the mixed Foundation Stage class, provision for Reception Year pupils is not sufficiently distinguished and this is also the case for the Year 2 pupils in the mixed Year 1/2 class.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the school has introduced the new frameworks for literacy and numeracy in Key Stages 1 and 2 and for teaching phonics in Foundation Stage. It has also revised systems for teaching writing and reading, establishing much-needed common methods of working across the school. This has resulted in teachers being able to identify more accurately the gaps in pupils' knowledge. The next step is to refine the planning and tailor the provision

more accurately to tackle these deficits, particularly for the pupils in Years 1/2, who have had an especially disrupted education, and for pupils in Year 3.

The whole-school timetables have been revised and lessons made shorter, freeing up time for an additional third session each morning. A good start has been made on establishing cross-subject links to enliven the curriculum and make it more meaningful for pupils. Considerable work has also been done to improve the quality of the teaching of writing and guided reading and this is beginning to improve pupils' responses in lessons and their progress. However, more thought needs to be given to the level of challenge in the reading material provided for the more able pupils in Key Stage 2, especially as some pupils already have reading ages above and well above their chronological ages.

The improvements in the provision and use of ICT have continued. Teachers have been keen to extend and share their skills and incorporate wherever possible ICT applications into all areas of the curriculum. Many lessons benefit from the use of interactive whiteboards to explain the aims and development of lessons, make bright, engaging presentations and perform a range of ICT-related tasks appropriate to the age and ability range of pupils. Teachers' skills, and those of their assistants, have been honed by training and feedback from lesson observations conducted by the local authority's consultant. Many have gained the confidence to allow pupils to use interactive whiteboards during presentations and summaries, providing excellent examples and a constantly shifting focus. The school has adopted several schemes which allow pupils to appraise their own standards and progress. The ICT suite and laptops are in regular and productive use by all pupils. While the facilities in the ICT suite are up to date, the small size of the room and the need to share computers taxes teachers' class management and organisational skills.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it ensures that pupils make the progress of which they are capable – good
- Address weaknesses in ICT provision by ensuring that the school has sufficient up-to-date resources – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The headteacher displays buoyant and assertive leadership, and continues to work hard at planning in an increasingly focused and effective way. She has the confidence of her senior colleagues and subject coordinators, who willingly support her in tackling assertively the challenges faced by the school. The headteacher has benefited from the support of the associate headteacher and the local authority adviser, with whom she has conducted joint lesson observations and focused more sharply on the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers and their assistants, as well as pupils, remark on a new, positive atmosphere in the school. Staff with subject responsibilities have sought relevant training and are responding vigorously to the advice of inspectors and external consultants. Since the last monitoring visit, new staffing appointments and fresh assignment of responsibilities have stabilised staffing and have started to correct the negative effect of changes in teachers on standards.

In several subjects, including literacy, numeracy and ICT, better planning and coordination are resulting from the acquisition and application of nationally promoted schemes and frameworks. Coordinators are gaining confidence in leading valuable training, monitoring their colleagues' work and giving advice where required.

Governance is much improved. Those governors interviewed were keen to restore the school to a better position; they have a clearer and more discerning view of the school's strengths and weaknesses, as a result of local authority support. The governing body's school improvement monitoring committee now meets half termly, governors observe lessons, meet with named coordinators and play a more robust role in discussions about the school's work.

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

- Refine development planning so that it is concise and focused and effective in raising standards and achievement – satisfactory

External support

The local authority has provided very good and robust support since the previous monitoring inspection, especially over staffing issues. The associate headteacher continues to provide valuable one-to-one mentoring for the headteacher, as and when requested. She also undertakes joint observations and has supported teachers in the use of data and in developing subject leadership. A fruitful relationship has been built between teaching staff in Kingsway Primary School and those of the associate headteacher's school, allowing the sharing of good practice. The Kingsway staff report positively on the continued support provided by the local authority's consultants. The support as a whole is very astutely overseen and managed by the local authority chief primary adviser.

Priorities for further improvement

- Extend the 'Letters and Sounds' phonics programme fully into Key Stage 1 and into Key Stage 2 for lower-ability pupils or those with poor phonic skills.
- Focus on Key Stage 1 and Year 3 on writing for the more able pupils in Year 2; mathematics generally for Year 2 and filling the gaps in writing and number skills for Year 3 pupils.
- Extend the reading material for the more able pupils in Key Stage 2.
- Increase the opportunities for pupils to access, use and apply the ICT provision now available in school.