

29 February 2008

Mrs Catherine Fenton
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Fenton

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF CHURCH ROAD
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Eithne Proffitt and John Ashton, Additional Inspectors, and Katrina Gueli HMI, to your school on 27 and 28 February, 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 June 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

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 Children's Services for Bolton.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF CHURCH ROAD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 27 and 28 February 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed an assembly and lessons in all classes, examined examples of pupils' work and scrutinised documents. Meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior staff, a group of pupils, a governor and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

A new permanent headteacher took up her post in January 2008. The full-time acting deputy headteacher seconded by the LA continues in her post until July 2008. There are also two assistant headteachers, one of whom is on a 0.6 contract. The acting deputy headteacher has held a non-teaching role since the end of October 2007. The two assistant headteachers share the teaching of one class of children from Year 3 and 4.

The class structure at the time of this visit included eleven classes. Since the last visit Years 5 and 6 have been divided into four classes, two in Year 5 and two in Year 6. A small number of pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 are in different year group classes from those appropriate to their chronological age, and there is a mixed Year 3 and 4 class. Approximately eight working weeks have elapsed since the last monitoring visit.

Achievement and standards

Standards throughout Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 remain below average and pupils continue to underachieve. The school's leadership team has implemented appropriate strategies and systems to lay the foundations for improvement. At senior leadership level there is a determination to drive standards upwards. Issues relating to underachievement are beginning to be tackled with increased pace and rigour. However, the impact of recent actions is yet to be seen in lessons and pupils' work. Teachers are now more aware of their pupils' current levels of attainment, particularly in mathematics, and where they need to be by the end of each term. Not all teachers use this information to plan activities to match the full range of abilities in the class. In too many lessons the work is not challenging enough to ensure that pupils of all abilities work to capacity and make the progress of which they are capable. Assessment information is not consistently reliable and so the school cannot be assured that all pupils are making enough progress.

Targeted strategies are in place to accelerate the progress of underachieving pupils. However, until the school carries out a detailed and accurate analysis of the outcomes of these strategies, it is not possible to measure the extent to which pupils are catching up on the significant amount of lost ground in their prior learning.

- Raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in English, mathematics and science, particularly that of more able pupils – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

The school council continues to function well. Pupils enjoy many aspects of school and say that they find their teachers friendly and helpful. They are aware of changes made this term including a firm line on school uniform to promote smart appearance, and new rewards systems which are motivating. For example, the 'golden pen scheme' is helping to promote pride in handwriting and presentation. Other work to raise self-esteem is ongoing. During the inspection a good assembly encouraged pupils to think about valuing themselves and feeling special. New furniture and resources have been purchased to help encourage pupils to feel valued and to respect their school environment. Pupils are increasingly aware of their targets in English and mathematics, although this is not consistent.

Since the last monitoring visit the school has made strenuous efforts to improve attendance. Attendance is now very high profile in school. Following the arrival of the new headteacher, new rewards for good attendance are in place. Individual 100% attendance certificates are issued on a monthly basis and well publicised. A prominent chart in the school hall shows attendance on a week-by-week basis and the clearly improving trend this term. In the week prior to the monitoring visit attendance was at a higher level than any previous week this academic year. However, the legacy of low attendance in the autumn term means the school is unlikely to achieve its original overall target for the year. The use of rewards for the class with the highest attendance is helping to generate peer pressure and encourage children to take responsibility for coming to school. Pupils are enthusiastic about the new rewards. The school is receiving the support of the Education Welfare Service in tackling families with children with very low attendance and there is evidence of more vigorous pursuit by the authority. Punctuality is improving. The parents' champion has helped to publicise the attendance issue with parents. Further work is planned to encourage attendance amongst the small group of children with below 80% attendance. The number in this group has reduced significantly since last term.

Pupils report that behaviour is dealt with appropriately and they like the system of rewards and sanctions now in place. Most behaviour observed by inspectors was at least satisfactory, and much was good. Clear behaviour plans are now in place for the small number of pupils who have particular problems. Inspectors observed very few instances of disruptive behaviour in classrooms but pupils sometimes lack enthusiasm for learning and can be slow to tackle set tasks diligently. There have been a small number of exclusions this term.

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

- Improve attendance so that it is at least in line with the national average – good.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning remains similar to that found at the last monitoring visit. Teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage continue to be good. While some good and outstanding teaching is evident especially in Year 6, too much teaching in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is still only satisfactory. Some inadequate teaching also remains. Since the new headteacher arrived in January much work has been done to improve the quality of teachers' planning, and lessons are beginning to be planned more effectively to meet the differing needs of learners. Some teachers are evaluating the impact of their teaching on pupil progress and using this to support the planning of future lessons. However, this approach is not consistent across the school. All planning is now monitored regularly by the deputy headteacher who identifies clear areas for development. This is contributing to improvements in quality and consistency. Teachers are being more effectively supported in improving their practice through regular school based training sessions, coaching, individual support plans and opportunities to observe colleagues in other schools. In the more effective lessons that were seen, the key factors to accelerate learning such as crisp, rapid pace and the right level of challenge for pupils, made the learning purposeful and motivating. At the moment, however, these lessons remain a minority.

All lessons now have learning objectives and outcomes which are shared with pupils, but the effectiveness with which this is done still varies greatly. In Year 6, for example, objectives were used very well so students knew exactly which features to include to produce a 'good' piece of writing in a particular style. This resulted in work of a better standard being written. Pupils were able to review their work independently to identify strengths and areas for improvement. In some lessons pupils spend considerable time copying objectives into their books which uses valuable lesson time but has little impact on their progress. Often, the period of whole-class teaching, where children are on the carpet, for example, is too long, leading to a lack of engagement which slows the pace of learning and limits progress. The degree of challenge is often insufficient and teacher expectations of the quality and quantity of work that learners should produce are too low in many cases. The quality of marking continues to be variable and, although learners are often praised for what they have achieved, there is limited written feedback to inform individuals how to improve further.

Whilst the school has done a great deal to increase teachers' awareness of pupils' levels of attainment and of the need to improve the quality of teaching and learning in lessons, its monitoring of how well pupils are doing over longer periods of time is less effective. The school lacks the full range of required, accurate assessment data in the core subjects to inform its planning. Consequently, senior leaders do not have an accurate overview of how effectively its actions to improve teaching and learning are contributing to raising standards and accelerating pupils' progress.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, eradicating inadequate teaching and increasing significantly the proportion of good teaching – inadequate.

Leadership and management

The new headteacher took up post in January 2008 and has very quickly established herself as a clear and authoritative leader, with a strong commitment to driving forward very rapidly the necessary improvements to ensure that the children receive the quality of education they deserve. She has the support of the staff and has extremely rapidly formed her own accurate assessment of the current priorities. This has led to a new action plan being devised, highly focused and with clear success criteria. This is being carefully monitored on a fortnightly basis. The headteacher has been forthright in establishing her expectations and demanding compliance. Teachers have welcomed her arrival. Morale has improved and teachers are now beginning to be more positive and confident about improving their own practice. As well as many staff development sessions, individual support and coaching plans are in place. A recent work scrutiny comparing pupils' work with that of another school has provided impetus in raising teacher expectations of both the quantity and quality of work.

Although much work has been done, the school is still at an early stage of development in terms of improving teaching and learning enough to bring about the more rapid progress needed. Nevertheless, firm foundations have been established and the pace of change is increasing. Teachers' awareness, recognition and ownership of weaknesses in teaching and learning are developing along with a willingness to change.

A new senior leadership structure has been proposed which would secure a permanent leadership team by September 2008. This will shortly be considered by governors. A new chair of governors is to be elected following the retirement of the previous chair. Governor training has been arranged to help governors develop their roles as critical friends, and to ensure that they do monitor and challenge the school effectively.

The acting deputy headteacher continues to make a significant contribution to the school's leadership. She continues to work very hard to generate momentum for change, taking a particular lead on assessment and tracking, and planning of teaching and learning. Subject coordinators are developing confidence in their new roles and are involved in staff training. Problems identified with teachers' inaccurate assessment of pupils' current levels are being tackled, particularly in mathematics, and tracking of progress is now better established. Further analysis is needed to ensure that the school has accurate and up to date evidence of the progress of different groups of pupils. A range of intervention and booster programmes are in place to help underachievers catch up, but these have yet to be fully evaluated.

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

- Improve leadership and management, including governance – satisfactory.

External support

A new school improvement partner has taken over since the previous visit and the LA has also appointed a consultant to support the school. He has visited on a regular basis and provided sound advice on moving forward, for example, with the leadership structure and the new action plan. The LA continues to provide financial support which is being used to benefit the children in school now, for example, through staffing an additional class for Years 5 and 6, and the purchase of learning resources. Links with other schools are used effectively to support professional development in teaching and learning. The collaborative group continues to take a strategic lead supported by the LA and the role of parents' champion is developing. The LA continues to provide support for the school in managing its deficit budget and associated issues.