

7 March 2008

Mr John Littler
Acting Headteacher
Bruche Community Primary School
Seymour Drive
Padgate
Warrington
WA1 3TT

Dear Mr Littler

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BRUCHE COMMUNITY
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Mrs Shields and Mr Jones, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 5 and 6 March 2008, 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 September 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

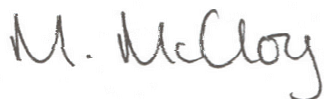
Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

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 Children's Services for Warrington.

Yours sincerely



Marguerite McCloy
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF BRUCHE COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 5 and 6 March 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher and members of staff, the chair of governors, groups of pupils and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the inspection in September 2007, the previous headteacher has resigned from his post. The LA arranged the secondment of a successful headteacher from another local school to take over the leadership of Bruche during the recruitment and selection process for a substantive post holder. The new headteacher will be taking up her position after the Easter break. During the long-term absence of the deputy headteacher, the LA has ensured that an experienced leading teacher has been seconded to the post from January until the end of the summer term. A further three members of the permanent teaching staff were absent at the time of this visit.

Achievement and standards

Evidence seen during this inspection indicates that the school is making satisfactory progress towards improving pupils' achievement in English and mathematics in lessons. While in some classes progress is good, in others it is too variable. This is because teaching and learning are inconsistent and some inadequate teaching remains. Consequently, pupils' progress is not yet strong enough throughout the school to ensure that all pupils reach their potential and overcome the legacy of underachievement. There are too few planned opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills across other curriculum subjects and this is also restricting the pace of improvement.

After previous attempts failed to become established, the school is now committed to its involvement in the Intensifying Support Programme (ISP). The impact of recent professional development for teachers has had a positive impact on improving pupils' standards in writing, which was the main ISP focus last term. However, staff changes have held back the rate of improvement in some classes and there are inconsistencies in the standards reached in classes in the same year group. Although there has been a slight improvement in mathematics, this is variable throughout the school. The ISP has recently focused on improving standards of pupils' mental mathematics skills. In some classes this has paid real dividends and pupils confidently and quickly solve problems and really enjoy the tasks set. Improvement in mathematics has been hampered because until very recently there has been no effective subject action plan to clearly drive up standards.

Based on performance information provided by the school and scrutiny of pupils' current work, standards in Year 6 are below average and the school has some way

to go in order to meet the challenging targets set for this year group. Standards in Year 2 are broadly average as highlighted in the previous report.

A recent focus of teachers' professional development has brought a greater understanding of where pupils are in terms of their learning. New arrangements have been introduced recently to track and monitor pupils' progress, but it is too early to judge the impact of this system on raising standards. Analysis of teachers' assessment files indicates that these new arrangements are not implemented consistently in all classes. In the best practice, teachers use assessment information to plan and adjust work so that it is carefully matched to pupils' prior attainment and so challenge and extend their skills and knowledge. However, the potential to improve the progress made by individuals is not fully exploited in all classes.

All pupils have learning targets to improve their writing and mental mathematics skills; these are directly linked to the ISP. Most pupils are aware of these targets but a small minority are uncertain about what they mean. Consequently, this limits their understanding of how they can improve.

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

- Improve standards and achievement in English and mathematics – satisfactory
- Improve the use of assessment and target setting – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being were not a focus for inspection on this visit. They continue to be a positive feature of the school, as pupils display good behaviour and attitudes and get along well with each other.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory progress has been made to improve the standard of teaching and learning since the last inspection. As a result of its monitoring, the school's leadership has introduced a focused programme of professional development for every teacher. Training has been provided on the features of good teaching as well as tackling whole-school priorities aimed at raising standards in the curriculum areas detailed in the inspection report. As a result, satisfactory improvement has been made in the quality of teaching, although some inadequate teaching remains. This reflects the inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Some classes have had a number of different teachers since last September and the school has experienced a high incidence of short- and long-term absence over this period. This has impacted adversely on the continuity of improvement. The school has reorganised and improved the use of some of its learning areas, most particularly in the Foundation Stage, where the six areas of learning are identified and provided for more effectively than previously.

Where teaching is good, teachers and support staff work closely together to meet the needs of their pupils. There is a good match of work to the individual abilities of

pupils, and teachers' evaluation of previous lessons informs their future planning. Teachers have high expectations of work and behaviour and their lessons move along at a good pace. Pupils are encouraged to develop independent working skills as well as working effectively in groups. Good use is made of resources such as interactive whiteboards and computers to make lessons interesting and varied, and pupils have the opportunity to experience a variety of learning styles. In other less effective lessons pupils are not sufficiently challenged or the work provided is too difficult for them. In a minority of lessons pupils become demotivated, lose interest and make little progress as a result. There is a lack of variety in the tasks provided and too few opportunities for meaningful discussion or independent learning.

Behaviour and relationships were good in all the lessons observed during this visit, and pupils generally are keen to work and make progress. At the moment, this enthusiasm and cooperation is not being sufficiently harnessed in some classes to raise standards and achievement. The school's new marking policy aims to provide pupils with the praise and guidance they need to progress further. Again, the application of this initiative is inconsistent across the school and it has some way to go before it starts to significantly impact on standards. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been improved by the introduction of more sharply focused and targeted individual education plans. The school is also making more effective use of intervention strategies to improve the progress of its underachieving pupils. Until recently, these strategies tended to be targeted exclusively at those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning – satisfactory

Leadership and management

In a relatively short time, the acting headteacher has had a significant and positive impact on overall leadership and strategic planning for improvement. He is well supported by the acting deputy headteacher who is appropriately taking a leading role in developing mathematics across the school during the absence of the subject leader. A further member of the leadership team is effectively managing the delivery and monitoring of the ISP and, as a result, is increasingly confident in leading this initiative with the support of the LA's primary strategy manager.

Self-evaluation is open and honest, leading to a clear acknowledgement of the school's areas of weakness. Appropriate plans of action are in place through which to make the necessary improvements, although only very early signs of the impact of these actions can be seen. For example, the consistent and regular monitoring of teaching and learning in recent months correctly identified some specific weaknesses. As a result of a programme of support and training, including support plans for individual staff, the school's evidence shows that the skills of some teachers are improving and the proportion of inadequate lessons is reducing. Performance management systems are now in place and teachers' professional development plans include appropriate targets linked to improving pupils' progress. Teachers have an

increased understanding of their accountability for raising standards and achievement across the school.

Teaching assistants appreciate the opportunities provided for them to use their skills and initiative in taking on additional responsibilities. Teachers are being encouraged to develop their leadership skills and some are voluntarily taking on extra responsibility to improve the school's capacity for change. Examples of this can be seen in the leadership of the Foundation Stage and of special educational needs provision. Overall, staff morale and teamwork has improved, despite the challenges still to be faced regarding the reduced number of pupils on roll and the possibility of a staffing restructure in the near future.

Governors are now provided with good quality information about the school's performance by the acting headteacher. Governors have not held the school to account sufficiently for its performance in the past, and are having to make up for lost ground. Governors have received training for their role and are beginning to develop a clearer understanding of how to interpret school performance data and ask relevant and challenging questions about what this shows. A key aspect in the school's capacity to improve will be the way in which the LA and governors plan for sustainability and stability of staff and leadership in the near future.

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

- Improve leadership at all levels in the school – satisfactory

External support

The LA had been providing additional support to the school's leadership prior to the September inspection due to concerns about the slow pace of improvement in previous targets set for the school. Unfortunately, these concerns were not fully communicated to or understood by governors, who were subsequently shocked and surprised by the outcome of the school's inspection.

The LA's support plan is succinct and clearly focused on the school's four key areas for improvement. A project team has been established to oversee delivery of the action plans. The capacity of the governing body has been strengthened by the appointment and training of two new governors. The school is benefiting from regular input and training by the primary strategy manager and advisory teachers. The impact of this is being seen in the improving knowledge and capability of some class teachers and middle leaders.

Action plans are appropriately resourced and include clear success criteria by which the effectiveness of the LA's intervention and support can be evaluated. However, the current planned timescales for actions go no further than July 2008. The LA's target date for removal of special measures is autumn 2008. This target is over-ambitious when taking into account the imminent arrival of a new headteacher and the unclear picture with regard to the school's future staffing establishment.

Priorities for further improvement

The school should continue its work on the four priorities identified in the September 2007 inspection.