

22 April 2008

Mrs B Portman  
Headteacher  
Benchill Primary School  
Benchill Road  
Wythenshawe  
Manchester  
M22 8EJ

Dear Mrs Portman

### Ofsted monitoring of schools with a Notice to Improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 21 April 2008, for the time you gave to our discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. It was very helpful to talk to the pupils, who were extremely polite and responsive. I also appreciate the time given by the chair of governors.

Since the last inspection the associate headteacher and an additional teacher, appointed with the support of the local authority, have moved on to support another school. Temporary appointments have been made to two teaching posts. A substantive appointment has been made to the post of deputy headteacher. A plan is in place to gradually reduce the school's deficit budget. Consultation is almost complete regarding the proposal to federate Benchill Primary School with Newall Green High School.

This letter 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.

As a result of the inspection on 17 and 18 September 2007, the school was asked to

- Improve achievement and raise standards in English, mathematics and science.
- Use assessment information more rigorously to plan the next steps in pupils' learning to ensure that they are appropriately challenged and make good progress.
- Ensure that leaders and managers rigorously monitor the impact of actions taken to improve pupils' achievements.
- Improve attendance.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher are very visible around the school. This effective partnership provides a strong direction for the school and has helped raise staff morale. They are determined to improve standards. A clear strategy to encourage good behaviour has succeeded in creating a positive climate for learning. Pupils who spoke to the inspector were quick to explain that behaviour is much better and does not hinder their learning.

Classrooms are bright and well organised: very good use is made of pupils' work to provide a stimulating and interesting environment in which to learn. The drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning is shared by all staff and they are committed to making lessons appealing to pupils. There is a whole school approach to the planning of lessons which focuses on objectives for pupils' learning. Information and communication technology is used well to present information and this engages pupils and sustains their concentration. In the best lessons, teachers use regular assessments to gauge how well pupils are achieving and this enables learning to progress in a step-by-step way which builds on previous knowledge. In these lessons a high degree of practical activity is provided and pupils discuss their work with each other. This develops their speaking and listening skills well. This good practice is variable across the school and is not yet consistent in each year group or class.

Pupils now know their curriculum targets, which are set in reading, writing and mathematics. These are displayed in classrooms and recorded in pupils' books. In Year 6 they are particularly effective in focusing pupils' learning. Marking is regularly completed by teachers and often gives pupils a good idea of how to improve their work. In some classes however, teachers' comments are too complex or wordy and the clarity of some handwriting makes them difficult for pupils to understand. As a result of the improvements in teaching and learning pupils are also making better progress. The school leadership team has created an, 'I can do' culture and this is seen in the positive attitude of most pupils towards learning. Observations of pupils' written work show that progress accelerated in the spring term and this momentum is being sustained in the summer term. In particular, the pupils in Year 6 show significant improvement in the rate of their progress. Whilst standards as shown by the school's data are below average and pupils' achievement is inadequate the rate of progress to improve this is satisfactory.

The governing body and senior leaders acted decisively to improve the monitoring role of phase and subject leaders. There are now regular meetings to analyse the progress which pupils are making. Every teacher contributes assessment data for each pupil in reading, writing and mathematics, and this is scrutinised by subject leaders in English and mathematics and discussed with the senior team. The governing body receives informative reports on a regular basis. As a result the governors are well placed to effectively challenge the school's performance. The assessment reports on each pupil are transferred to a class progress grid which gives quick and easy access to measure how well each pupil is doing. In turn this data

informs both the targets set for pupils and the level of challenge in lessons so that activities are correctly matched to pupils' needs. This process is relatively new and there are some inconsistencies between classes in the impact on the quality of pupils' learning.

Attendance levels have improved a little due to effective procedures put in place by the school. There are many incentives to encourage pupils to attend school including stickers, prizes and even flowers for mums of pupils with high attendance. The school uses external agencies well to support pupils who are absent. A first day of absence system makes an instant check on missing pupils. School data show a clear correlation between the rate of pupils' progress and the level of their attendance at school. The school has held an evening meeting to promote parents' awareness of this. Attendance remains below average and the school plans to further improve communication with parents.

Support from the local authority was most prominent in the autumn term 2007 with the presence of an associate headteacher and an additional class-teacher. This extra provision was withdrawn as confidence in the capacity of the school to improve was raised. The school effectiveness officer from the local authority makes regular visits and provides advice to the leaders and governors. For example, she has conducted joint observations of lessons with staff, scrutinised pupils' work and attended pupils' progress meetings.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

John Coleman  
Her Majesty's Inspector