

31 March 2008

Mr C Russell
Barton Junior School
Barton Road
Dover
Kent
CT16 2ND

Dear Mr Russell

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BARTON JUNIOR SCHOOL

Following my visit with David Collard, Additional Inspector, to your school on 18 and 19 March 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 June 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

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 second monitoring inspection: 18 and 19 March 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed lessons, scrutinised pupils' work, documents and assessment and attendance information; met with the federation's senior leadership team, its chair of governors and the local authority's (LA) school improvement adviser; and met with the head of Barton Junior School, the assistant headteacher, subject leaders and teachers.

Context

The new head of school joined the staff in January 2008. At the same time, the temporary assistant headteacher's position was made permanent. One member of the teaching staff has left since the last monitoring visit and a short-term appointment has been made to cover that post. A new subject leader for mathematics has been appointed and will take up post in April.

Achievement and standards

The school has sustained the improvements to pupils' progress evident at the time of the last monitoring visit, supported by an increased proportion of lessons where pupils' learning moves on at a good pace. The overall picture indicates that progress has quickened for most pupils, and is strongest in English. Achievement in mathematics is also starting to improve further as pupils' confidence with number and calculation gradually increases. The school is well aware that it still has further to go to secure the consistently robust and rapid progress necessary to help pupils to catch up on past underachievement. Its assessment data show that there is still a lot of variation in progress between and within year groups, including for those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and this unevenness remains an inhibiting factor.

Improvements to the rate of progress are too recent to have made an impact on standards, and these are still low at Year 6, most particularly in science. The school is now poised to give this subject the closely focused attention that it urgently needs in order to tackle the many gaps in pupils' scientific knowledge, skills and understanding.

Personal development and well-being

Swift action taken earlier in the term ensured that the challenging behaviour of a very small minority of pupils in Year 6 was short lived. Although these incidents prompted some fixed-term exclusions, the school has not needed to use this sanction again since. Teaching and learning continue to be undisturbed by any poor behaviour. Indeed, in most lessons, pupils work with interest and motivation and willingly cooperate to complete a shared task. It is clear that substantial improvements to the learning environment – and the introduction of a school

uniform they helped to select – are lifting pupils' self esteem and pride in their school. Pupils are well aware of the improvements within the school. For example, they report that teaching is better and work is marked more regularly with direction on what they have to do next.

Current attendance figures are lower than those at the time of the last monitoring visit, but are still at a higher level this academic year than they have been for the last three. The school continues to tackle attendance issues with the help of outside agencies, and uses legal measures where necessary. Federation staff have been moved across to strengthen liaison with families where children's attendance is poor, pending permanent appointments dedicated to Barton.

Quality of provision

The proportion of good teaching has increased since the last monitoring visit so that teaching of this calibre is now to be found in the majority of lessons. Many more activities have the challenge and interest that were lacking before. Pupils listen carefully to stories that are relevant to their experience and read with liveliness. They enjoy problem solving and practical activities, which also give valuable opportunities for developing independent learning skills and habits. Most of the time, pupils work diligently and productively. Nevertheless, the remaining variability in teaching means that pupils are not yet making the consistently good and better progress needed to catch up. Occasionally, teaching is still inadequate when, for example, subject matter is not taught with confidence and clarity. There are also missed opportunities to extend pupils' knowledge and skills further – in mathematics for instance. Study support managers have now been appointed and deployed to each class, where they are working closely with small groups of pupils. The school is also able to draw on the resources of other schools in the federation in order to fill any temporary shortfall in study assistants. Some additional support programmes for lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are operating again and are to be extended further.

With much valuable support and guidance from LA consultants, and continuing input from the federation, the school is maintaining a steady underlying focus on improving the curriculum. Teachers from the same year group plan lessons together, and support to individuals from senior staff has also helped to move things on. Importantly, the school is identifying where pupils have significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding and adjusting planning to fill them. These missing elements, which are most apparent in mathematics and science, are also holding pupils back from more rapid progress. Whilst devising a longer term strategy for pupils in other year groups, work for the summer term has been appropriately tailored to take account of the remedial action required to give pupils in Year 6 the important scientific knowledge they need for national tests and secondary education.

All teachers continue to take responsibility for regular assessments of pupils' progress and the resulting data provide valuable information for tracking progress and making adjustments to provision. These practices now need to take full account of standards in pupils' everyday work in lessons and books, as well as the outcomes of formal evaluations through tests, to ensure that assessments of attainment are always accurate.

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 – good.

Leadership and management

The school continues to move forward with considerable support from the LA and the federation. The redecoration programme is taking place at a cracking pace so that classrooms and corridors are fresh and smart. These improvements have clearly helped to lift morale. The uncertainties about change have gone and members of staff are positive, enthusiastic and keen to move things on. Pupils, too, notice the difference in climate and ethos. Motivation and productivity now feature much more often during lessons than they did before and these qualities provide an important foundation and spur for learning. The school's development plans have been updated to reflect its current circumstances and priorities, and set out clearly how the school is to improve.

Crucially, there is now a stable team of senior leaders within the school. With support from the LA, monitoring activities are becoming more formalised. This approach is proving vital for raising the quality of teaching and staff clearly welcome professional feedback. Having established a regular timetable of visits to lessons, these checks now need to be more robust, frequent and persistent in order to secure consistently good and better teaching and learning. Shortcomings are not yet always rigorously followed up in subsequent visits to ensure that individual issues and common problems are tackled and resolved swiftly. Whilst a wider range of monitoring activities has been introduced, these need to be used more often to help gather further evidence about the school's performance. The appointment of a new subject leader for science has enabled this subject to have a greater focus. At the same time, the school has ensured that the subject leader for mathematics is familiar with the school prior to taking up this position next term. The school is fully aware that these subjects now require rapid attention.

It is still early days, but the federation is providing valuable opportunities for staff with particular responsibilities to extend their expertise through discussion with colleagues holding the same positions in the group's other schools. These meetings enable staff to share ideas and benefit from each other's work. Governors have developed their knowledge of the school and its needs and are ensuring that funds are directed at necessary improvements to staffing, resources and accommodation, as well as keeping an appropriate check on the school's overall performance.

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 – good.

External support

The quality and impact of the LA's support since the last monitoring visit have been good. The local authority's statement of action has usefully been adjusted to include the school's move into the federation. The interface between the support provided by the federation and the LA is now clear and has been much strengthened by the federation's school improvement adviser also taking responsibility for Barton.

The local authority's considerable work with the school is on a wide range of fronts and has been particularly valuable in supporting the development of the curriculum. In addition to continuing improvements to planning for English and mathematics, consultants have worked closely with the new science leader to identify learning needs, modify provision and plan a way forward. Information and communication technology has also been targeted, although this support is at an early stage. Shared monitoring activities by the school's improvement adviser with senior staff have helped to extend expertise and promote the expectation that the quality of teaching will need constant and robust attention for it to improve to where it needs to be. The greater proportion of good teaching illustrates the impact of all this crucial groundwork.

The school also benefits from the LA's work within the federation. For example, LA consultants take part in the joint liaison meetings with staff from across the schools, such as the one recently for coordinators leading on inclusion and provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure robust, frequent and persistent monitoring of teaching and learning to secure consistently good and better teaching in the shortest possible time.
- Move rapidly to improve provision and progress in mathematics and science.
- Take full account of standards in pupils' everyday work, as well as the outcomes of formal evaluations, to ensure that assessments of attainment are always accurate.