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Mr James Shearly
The Headteacher
Houndsfield Primary School
Ripon Road
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Dear Mr Shearly

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HOUNDSFIELD
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Patricia Walker, Additional Inspector, to your school on 26 and 27 March 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in February 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

The school and local authority (LA) have rightly focused on securing the middle and senior leadership team. This and the move towards federation have resulted in the school moving forward, and as a result, the school is permitted to appoint up to two newly qualified teachers.

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 Education for Enfield.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF HOUNDSFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the third monitoring inspection: 26 and 27 March 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior and middle managers, the chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), a group of pupils and staff, a representative from the local authority and the Associate headteacher and the seconded deputies.

Context

Following the second monitoring inspection visit, a number of far-reaching changes in staffing have taken place and are linked to the local authority's revision of its action plan to increase the rate of improvement in the school. Partnership work with local schools has been used extensively to strengthen and support all managers and the teaching force, and to begin the process of federating the school with Churchfield Primary School, a successful local school with a similar intake. The headteacher of Churchfield Primary, her two deputies and a seconded, leading teacher from another local primary school, currently work alongside staff providing support and training tailored to the needs of the whole school, individuals and groups.

Difficulties with recruiting and retaining well qualified staff have persisted during the current term but skilful re-structuring of the senior team and re-organisation of the teaching staff have increased stability. Two teachers are absent because of long-term illness and a third is on maternity leave. Currently, two assistant headteachers share a Year 6 class. Two teachers, including a middle manager, have been moved to different year groups to reflect their strengths and the needs of the classes. Two supply teachers are in post until the end of the summer term, the LA consultant works with Year 5 pupils and the leading teacher works in Year 3. The acute difficulties in staffing, which have placed extra pressure on the school from 2007 to the present time, have now been largely managed well. A recently appointed inclusion manager will begin in April 2008 and five newly appointed and experienced teachers will take up their posts in September 2008.

Further upheavals in staffing are expected at the end of the current term, as three members of the senior team, including the headteacher, are leaving and two teachers on maternity leave plan to return to their posts at the start of the summer term. Comprehensive and forward planning has ensured that the school will have sufficient key staff next term. The timetable in Key Stage 2 has been reorganised to increase the amount of curriculum time for teaching English, mathematics and science in Years 4, 5 and 6.

Achievement and standards

Since the last monitoring inspection, the most recent evaluation of pupils' achievement and progress show an improving trend from very low starting points, often compounded by high pupil mobility. Standards remain well below average,

particularly in Year 6, but the assessment data on pupils' progress indicate that most pupils are making at least satisfactory progress with some of the more able making better progress. Pupils in Year 3 and one Year 4 class have made slower progress because the difficulties in staffing meant their teaching was inconsistent. The situation has now changed and most are beginning to make some gains, albeit, gradually. Problems with staffing have left a significant legacy of problems. Some year groups are still attempting to reach the levels expected for their age group within a short time. They have yet to grasp fully some of the most basic skills, which they are not confident in applying. For example, there are weaknesses in using basic grammatical features, doing mental arithmetic, calculations and problem solving accurately.

Evidence from lesson observations during this monitoring visit indicates that the literacy strategies are beginning to lead to improvements in pupils' work. Conversely, teachers keeping too rigidly to the schemes without offering work that is more challenging to all pupils hamper pupils' progress. In particular, some of the more able pupils are ready to work at a much faster pace. Trends show that progress in science and mathematics, although standards are still very low, is improving because there is now more emphasis on investigative and problem solving work. Other factors contributing to the pupils making better progress include the extended teaching sessions and Saturday classes for targeted pupils and the increased curriculum time for teaching English, mathematics and science. Recent improvements in teaching and learning can be linked to the increasing training and support available to teachers.

The local authority has set challenging targets for the Year 2 and Year 6 pupils in line with the minimum expected for primary schools. The school is confident of meeting these targets in science and at the higher levels in all three subjects. There is less confidence about most pupils in Year 6 attaining Level 4 in English and mathematics because too many are late entrants to the school with low levels of attainment and/or they are at the early stage of learning English. Additionally, there is too little time to catch up on missed work. Reading, interpreting information accurately, and writing continue to be areas for improvement in both key stages. A more rigorous approach to tracking and assessing pupils' progress is contributing to staff identifying pupils for additional support.

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

- increase pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding, especially in mathematics and science to raise standards - satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils' attitudes to learning have improved and were seen to be good, and occasionally better, where there was effective and engaging teaching and the teacher's expectations were high. For example, pupils' behaviour was exemplary in a Year 5 science lesson because they were fully captivated by the investigative work. Behaviour around the school, in corridors and outdoors is much improved. Pupils recognise and appreciate that improvement in behaviour is leading to better learning. They say that, 'Behaviour has improved because of the golden rules which everyone

knows, so there are smiles on people's faces. It is a different school because lessons are hardly disrupted and we like this'.

Attendance has declined and, at 90.9% this term, it is below the average for the previous term and well below the average for primary schools. The school has identified recent illnesses during the early part of the term and extended holidays abroad among the most recent arrivals.

Quality of provision

The majority of teaching seen during the inspection was satisfactory or better. One lesson was inadequate and a second was barely adequate. Four lessons were good and one was outstanding. In some classes, especially in Year 6, the quality of learning lags behind that of teaching, as teachers and pupils strive to compensate for a long legacy of low expectations and under-achievement.

Improved lesson planning has resulted in lessons that are more structured and have a sharper focus. The setting of objectives for learning means that pupils generally understand what is expected of them, although there are instances when the work set does not offer sufficient challenge to the more able pupils. In the most successful lessons observed, questioning and discussion gave pupils the opportunity to extend their learning by thinking hard and listening to the ideas of others, topics were engaging, pupils collaborated well and independent learning was promoted. When teachers do not ask sufficiently searching questions, the opportunity to interact is lost, as is the chance for them to use pupils' responses to check their progress. Increased opportunities for independent learning have improved the rate of progress. For example, in the outstanding lesson, pupils' research into the effects of smoking led to excellent gains in knowledge and understanding, while short, timed tasks gave additional challenge and pace. The increase in the number of teaching assistants and their more effective deployment provides better support, a fact commented on appreciatively by pupils.

Teachers are now using now using assessment data to identify the needs of different groups within the class, but work set is not always pitched accurately to best meet the needs of pupils. For this reason, the more able pupils are not challenged enough and some pupils find the work too demanding without support. In satisfactory lessons, questioning is not used effectively to offer additional challenge and to assess progress, as teachers are too eager to move on to find the response they are looking for without giving due consideration to all contributions. The Foundation Stage is generally well organised but adults do not make enough attempt to ensure that all children are purposefully involved with activities. The main weaknesses in the unsatisfactory and barely satisfactory lessons were ineffective questioning, work not linked to pupils' abilities and too little emphasis on assessing and evaluating pupils' understanding. Teachers did not focus sufficiently on pupils' learning.

The quality of marking is inconsistent. While some marking gives good advice to pupils on what they need to do to improve, there are too many examples of work that is not marked. Other marking, while being supportive in recognising effort and

success, does not offer enough advice. Pupils have noted the inconsistency and have commented that teachers do not always have the time to do enough marking.

The curriculum is now better structured and gives all teachers clear guidance, with follow-up reminders, about what should be taught to each year group across the course of the school year. This is ensuring consistency and progression, particularly as the school is still undergoing frequent staff changes. The curriculum has been appropriately revised to meet the school's particular needs. For example, the blocking of each non-core subject into discrete two-week units was decided upon in order to intensify planning and enhance pupils' progress. Similarly, teaching in groups based on ability in Years 5 and 6 was introduced in order to raise achievement across all abilities.

The procedures for lesson planning are regularly completed in year teams and follows common formats, especially in mathematics and English. While this leads to greater consistency between classes, in terms of what learning is expected to take place, teachers are still expected to devise activities in each lesson that will best suit their classes. Teachers now plan in order to meet the needs of different groups of learners in their class and, although this matching is not yet always successful, they have better awareness of why this is important if pupils are to make good progress. Lesson plans are monitored at a number of levels both before and after teaching, and there are clear examples of where this has resulted in further advice and guidance over key areas of teaching such as subject coverage or timing. Although subject leaders are also monitoring lesson planning, there is acknowledgement that this is at an early stage and needs further development.

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

- improve the quality of teaching. In particular, raise teachers' expectations and ensure they take full responsibility for the learning of all pupils in their class - satisfactory
- review the curriculum, including the use of time available to teach it, to ensure pupils achieve as much as they can from year to year - satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The school is working very closely with the local authority from the revised and detailed, common action plan. It targets the right areas for improvement and has helped the school to develop a greater sense of urgency in recognising the next steps to take to bring about improvement in the quality of provision for pupils. The headteacher, with the support of the associate headteacher and local authority, has set the right direction for the school. As a result, the school has not shied away from making difficult decisions when they are required.

Staff, including middle managers, report confidence in the support received and ultimately the renewed energy emanating from leadership. Middle managers have benefited from working with the seconded senior leaders and consultants; they value the direction, support and training provided. The targeted support has started to impact, and a 'can do' culture is emerging.

Although there is still a high degree of external and internal support, the middle managers are now better equipped to take ownership for their areas of responsibilities, in particular, monitoring and evaluating teaching and pupils' progress. Teamwork is better established, assessment data is being used regularly to monitor performance and the middle managers have taken steps to hold team members to account through regular monitoring and target setting. They say that there '...has been a big improvement since the last monitoring visit, the atmosphere is better, improvements can be seen and the school is now more of a community'.

All aspects of teaching and learning are monitored regularly and, although the quality is still varied, there has been a sharper focus on the quality of teaching to give the senior leaders a clear and accurate picture of the performance of each teacher. The information yielded is used well to identify areas for development and to plan priorities for in-service training. Teachers and teaching assistants show a very enthusiastic response to the impact of this on their performance.

The seconded staff, including the school-based consultant, have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and the areas of work where improvements are needed. They are a formidable team and have made a strong contribution to moving the school forward in a short time by working together with the senior leaders. As a result, the impact of coaching and training are beginning to result in better teaching. They recognise that there is still much to do. There are still inconsistencies in teaching, and management practices need further improvement. Nevertheless, this effective support has helped the leadership team to increase its capacity to accurately evaluate its own strengths and weaknesses and identify the next steps for improvement. The IEB continues to provide good support through asking searching questions and holding the school to account.

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

- develop the skills of senior leaders, managers and governors in monitoring and evaluating the school's work and its impact on pupils' achievements - satisfactory.

External support

The LA has continued to provide a very good range of support for the school, which is well tailored to the changing needs. The highly effective support includes, for example, regular reviews of its work and has enabled the school to become more confident in evaluating its strengths and weaknesses. Plans for further improvements are clear and the high level of support is scheduled to continue until underachievement is eradicated and the school is fully self-sufficient.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by building on teachers' questioning skills, marking and use of assessment information to challenge and meet pupils' needs.