

08 July 2008

Mr Tony Hull
Headteacher
West Earlham Junior School
Scarnell Road
Norwich
Norfolk
NR5 8HT

Dear Mr Hull

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF WEST EARLHAM
JUNIOR SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Kathleen Yates, Additional Inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 June 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 March 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*

Newly qualified teachers may not 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 Norfolk.

Yours sincerely

Godfrey V Bancroft
Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF WEST EARLHAM JUNIOR SCHOOL

Report from the third monitoring inspection: 17 and 18 June 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with pupils, parents and carers, the headteacher and a representative of the Local Authority (LA).

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, in February 2008, the acting headteacher, who was a member of the County Headteacher Service, has moved to a permanent headship at another school. A formal partnership with a nearby school has been set up. The newly appointed, and very experienced, headteacher of that school is also now permanently in charge of this one and divides his time between the two. A consultant headteacher is also supporting the school. During this period other staff changes have taken place. The governing body has also resigned. Plans are in hand to put an interim executive board (IEB) in place, but this has not yet taken place. Although plans are not finalised it seems likely that the headteacher and the interim board may be in place until December 2010, when a clearer picture of the school's place in the plans for education in the area, will be known.

Achievement and standards

Pupils currently in Year 6, as shown by the initial analysis of annual test results, are on course to attain standards in English and science that are very low and standards in mathematics that are well-below average. Overall, these standards are not as high as those attained in 2007 because the current Year 6 pupils started from a lower base. Within this picture, standards in English and science have fallen, but those in mathematics have continued to improve. The improvement in mathematics is because teachers have worked effectively to improve pupils' mental and oral skills in the subject. In English the development of pupils' speaking and listening is taking longer than expected to impact fully on the quality of their writing. Increasing pupils' progress in science was identified as an area for improvement by the monitoring visit in February 2008. Progress in this respect is inadequate. Even so, because many of these pupils in Year 6 have come from very low starting points, their overall progress is satisfactory. The work seen in pupils' books and during lessons supports this view.

The school has robust assessment information to show that younger pupils, those currently in years 3, 4 and 5, are also making satisfactory progress, albeit from a low base when they join the school. Again, this is affirmed by the work seen during lessons and that in pupils' books. A similar picture of satisfactory progress is also evident for the school's very high proportion of pupils who find learning difficult.

Judgement

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

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science – *satisfactory*

Personal development and well-being

The strong focus on improving pupils' behaviour has continued through the consistent application of behaviour management strategies, resulting in satisfactory improvements. Attitudes to learning are also getting better. Some pupils are beginning to work on their own in small groups for short periods. While there are a few who are confident and sufficiently motivated to work independently, they are in the minority. Too often pupils lack the self discipline to stick at a task and see it through to the end. The school now has more vigilant systems in place to monitor and follow up absences. Communication with parents has improved and this has resulted in improved attendance rates.

Judgement

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

- Develop a wider range of more rigorous strategies to encourage better attendance – *satisfactory*

Quality of provision

The percentage of good teaching has improved since the last monitoring inspection and is helping to make pupils' progress more secure. This is because, under the guidance of the headteacher, the strategies that make teaching good are becoming increasingly well embedded, although they are not yet applied consistently by all teachers. Most teachers have appropriate expectations and plan work carefully to match the needs of the full range of abilities in their class. They provide clear introductions, so that pupils acquire an understanding of what they are going to learn. Whilst the quality of pupils' speaking and listening is low, it is improving because teachers are making much better use of questions to challenge and involve pupils and to maintain their interest in their learning. For their part many pupils are becoming increasingly confident and willing to answer questions and share their views.

However, a residue of inadequate teaching remains. Whilst the school is working hard to eradicate this; the problem has not been fully resolved. Sometimes lessons are dominated too much by the teachers' talking, which restricts the opportunities for pupils to be involved to the degree that they should and curtails the opportunities they need to improve their speaking and listening. There are also times when the work set for the more able pupils is not hard enough and that for the less able is too hard. This results in both groups sometimes not making enough progress. There are still too many occasions when pupils are more than happy to do relatively mundane tasks. At such times pupils tend to take the easy option and are not sufficiently enthusiastic about their learning.

The accuracy of assessment has improved at all levels. Teachers are making much better use of the information they gain from assessments to identify and respond to shortfalls in pupils' learning and to areas in which pupils are failing to make the expected progress. Many teachers also provide pupils with helpful guidance through the marking of work. In some cases pupils are starting to check the accuracy of their own work. Teachers and teaching assistants recognise and respond to the needs of those pupils who find learning difficult. Some teaching assistants are very pro-active, know the pupils' needs well and provide helpful support. However, in some lessons

teaching assistants are not sufficiently well briefed about their role. At such times they are not able to respond promptly enough to give pupils the help they need.

The strong focus on improving pupils' behaviour through the consistent application of strategies has brought about improvements. Whilst pupils rarely disrupt lessons, and certainly not to the extent they have done in the past, many remain passive learners and are very reliant on adult help for the progress they make. Pupils are much more aware of the targets for their progress, although many still struggle to explain what they need to do to make their work even better. Many teachers make frequent use of the school's 'traffic light' strategy for pupils to indicate how well they feel they have understood their work. However, some teachers do not exploit the potential benefits of this procedure fully by asking pupils to explain how they arrived at their understanding.

Within the curriculum the effective focus given to pupils' personal, social and emotional development is continuing to contribute well to the attitudes and behaviour of many. Teachers also draw pupils' attention to the links between subjects, which are helping to make their learning more meaningful.

Judgement

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

- Improve teachers' skills in managing pupils' behaviour so that more effective learning can take place – *satisfactory*

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are bringing about steady improvement. The headteacher and senior members of staff possess an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The recently appointed headteacher has settled in quickly. He has identified at an early stage what needs to be done to bring about improvements and is building on the work of the previous acting headteacher. An action plan that identifies areas for improvement is now in place. This plan shows very clearly what the school intends to do to improve its performance and to address the issues identified by the last inspection and by subsequent monitoring inspections. Middle managers, such as subject leaders, have been involved in the production of this plan to a far greater extent than in the previous ones. They are also involved much more in using the available assessment data and information gathered from monitoring to provide a basis for their contribution towards school improvement. However, in some subjects, such as science, where subject leadership is less effective this work has not yet brought about higher standards or improved the rate of pupils' progress sufficiently.

Following a review of its activities, the governing body identified that it was failing to fulfil its duties adequately. It felt unable to respond to the challenge of evaluating the quality of provision and in holding the school to account for its actions. As a result all the governors resigned together, which was felt by them to be in the best interests of the school. The Local Authority is currently forming an IEB to oversee the work of the school.

Judgement

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

- Ensure the school's leadership make better use of all the available data for monitoring and assessments to improve the provision and set challenging targets for pupils – *satisfactory*

External support

The LA has provided good support in an attempt to ensure the continuity and stability of the school whilst decisions about the wider education provision in the area are still being considered. At this time there are no plans to close the school, although several long term options are under discussion. These options include forming a permanent partnership with another school, becoming part of a wider school structure within the area or amalgamating in some form with the neighbouring infant school. The eventual outcome may involve a combination of some or all of these options. Following wide consultation the LA plans to make a decision for December 2010. With this in mind the LA has set up a formal partnership with this school and a neighbouring school. The two schools share the services of a very experienced headteacher. Staff at both schools also benefit from sharing their expertise and from a considerable number of joint training opportunities. The partnership has also been able to attract substantial additional funding. This funding will enable the school to appoint additional staff, including at a senior level to support its continued improvement. The school also benefits from the attachment of an additional consultant headteacher who supports the senior management team. The LA is also in the process of forming an IEB to replace the governing body. In time, it is intended this will lead to the establishment of a shadow governing body, to secure governance until the outcome of re-organisation is decided.