

22 May 2008

Mr J Starling
Acting Headteacher
Buxton Primary School
Aylsham Road
Buxton
Norwich
NR10 5EZ

Dear Mr Starling,

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BUXTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit to your school on 20 and 21 May 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 – satisfactory

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory

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 the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Norfolk.

Yours sincerely

Tricia Pritchard
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF BUXTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 20 and 21 May 2008

Evidence

HMI observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, teaching staff, pupils, members of the interim executive board and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The acting headteacher remains in post until the end of the summer term. Leadership arrangements for the autumn term are being finalised. No new staff have been appointed since the last monitoring visit. Class groupings are as follows: one class of Foundation Stage/Year 1 pupils, one class of Year 2/3 pupils, two classes of Year 4/5 pupils and one class of Year 6 pupils.

Achievement and standards

Attainment on entry is broadly average. Last year, the 2007 Foundation Stage profile data showed that children made good progress in the Foundation Stage. They achieved standards in all areas of learning which were above national expectations by the end of the reception year. These children are now in Year 1. At the time of the monitoring visit, it was not possible to judge accurately whether this same rate of progress had been maintained in Year 1 since end-of-year teacher assessment had yet to be carried out. In lessons observed, however, the evidence points to pupils not making such good progress in relation to their starting points. In Year 2, seven pupils have been assessed recently in reading, writing and mathematics. Preliminary analysis of the mathematics scores shows that the higher attaining pupils did not do as well as they could. The outcomes of the reading and writing assessments were not yet available.

The 2007 pupil performance data indicated that Year 6 pupils made inadequate progress throughout Key Stage 2, particularly in mathematics and science. Since then, there has been a concerted effort to raise standards. The school's most recent data indicates that pupils currently in Year 6 have made accelerated progress in these subjects. They were set challenging targets at the beginning of the year and have been expected to cover a lot of ground in a short time. However, it is not possible to judge their success in meeting these targets because they only sat their English, mathematics and science assessment tasks the week before the monitoring visit. The outcomes of these assessments will be reported during the next visit.

The school is now collecting systematic data on all pupils' attainment to enable staff to chart pupils' progress both during the year and from one year to the next. This data shows that pupils in Year 3, Year 4 and Year 5 have made faster progress since January. Despite this, their progress remains inadequate in relation to their starting points. For example, half of Year 5 pupils have not made the expected progress in mathematics and nearly three-quarters of Year 4 pupils have not made the expected progress in reading since Year 2. Targets for reading and writing are below age-

related expectations. A key factor affecting the attainment and progress of Year 4/5 pupils was the staffing disruptions at the beginning of the academic year.

Consistency and accuracy of teacher assessment, which was an issue at the time of the last monitoring visit, is improving. Teachers are more confident and secure in assessing pupils' work although they are not using the outcomes fully to inform their planning for all groups of pupils. They use the data effectively to target support for pupils at risk of underperforming.

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

- use the available data more effectively to identify what is needed to improve the rate of pupils' progress and raise standards in English, mathematics and science - satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Pupils enjoy school. Attendance is in line with the national average. Pupils conduct themselves well around school and relationships between pupils and adults, and between pupils are good. The new 'family eating' arrangements are very successful. The older pupils take good care of the younger pupils at mealtimes.

In lessons, most pupils attend well during the opening session. Their attention only lapses when the pace of lessons flags or when they remain sitting on the carpet for too long. Noise from adjacent teaching areas, however, hinders pupils' concentration in the Year 2/3 class. In group work, pupils enjoy working collaboratively but occasionally, when working in pairs, one takes over and the other becomes a passive learner.

The older pupils talk enthusiastically about their business enterprises. The extra-curricular clubs are well attended. The pupils enjoy the wider range of activities which are now on offer.

Quality of provision

Since the last monitoring visit, staffing has been stable and more pupils are being targeted to work in small groups. This is having a positive impact on the progress being made by those who are falling behind in some elements of learning. The extra support they receive to address identified weaknesses is accelerating their progress.

The quality of whole class teaching is inconsistent. Good teaching was observed in Year 4/5 mathematics lessons but more inadequate teaching was observed on this visit than on the last. However, this is not necessarily replicated in pupils' books where there is more evidence of satisfactory teaching and learning. A contributory factor to the inadequate teaching observed is the introduction of a renewed curriculum framework. Not all teachers are confident in retaining an emphasis on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills through broad themes and topics. The two main areas for development lie in setting clear learning objectives which are focused upon defining what pupils should learn instead of what pupils should do in a

lesson, and providing tasks which are better matched to pupils' abilities. With the exception of Year 6, there are two year groups in each class. Too often, higher, middle and lower attaining pupils in both year groups are set the same objectives and tasks. This is particularly slowing down the progress of higher attaining pupils. The new writing books are a good initiative and are contributing to better presentation of pupils' work. However, there is not a shared understanding amongst staff about how these should be used to track pupils' progress in writing.

The balance of the curriculum was identified as an area for development at the last monitoring visit. Since then, most class timetables have been redrafted so that literacy and numeracy are interspersed with other subjects. Pupils have more variety in their day and are responding better to this approach.

Learning ladders on the walls in classrooms continue to be effective. Pupils know their targets and teachers constantly refer to them in lessons. They are increasingly involved in assessing their own work and checking their progress with their peers. Lower attaining pupils are well supported by teaching assistants. However, there is scope for providing more academic guidance to higher attaining pupils. They are often left to work independently and without support.

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

- give pupils greater understanding of their targets and involve them consistently in recording and checking their own progress – satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

Since the last inspection visit, subject leaders have become more involved in monitoring standards and the quality of teaching. While this focus on distributing leadership is a welcome development, they need more skills-based training in observing lessons and giving feedback. Their assessment of the quality of teaching is overgenerous and is insufficiently focused on identifying strengths and areas for development. The acting headteacher has identified areas of underperformance and is providing appropriate staff development opportunities for those who need extra support. The challenge will be to evaluate the impact of this support.

The interim executive board is very focused upon seeing the school thrive and is planning for the future leadership and governance of the school. However, members recognise that they have not been sufficiently informed about the quality of teaching and learning. The self evaluation document has been updated recently and reflects the priorities identified during the inspection and subsequent monitoring visits. Subject leaders are involved in the improvement planning process and in monitoring progress with the raising attainment plan. This is a good development and has led to their having more ownership of the plan. There is scope now for taking a longer term view in order to sustain improvement. A good team spirit exists which is characterised by a determination to succeed. There are well conceived plans to secure the future leadership of the school and to assure the quality of teaching.

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

- improve strategic leadership and management at all levels so that responsibilities and accountability of all involved are clearly defined and there are systems to evaluate the impact of these – satisfactory progress.
- bring greater rigour into monitoring teaching and learning to address identified weaknesses – inadequate progress.

External support

The school receives considerable support from local authority consultants and the school development adviser who make regular visits. They have been most supportive with the introduction of the renewed curriculum framework and in assisting with updating the self evaluation document. However, there is scope for more rigorous monitoring of the effectiveness of this support and, in particular, for judging whether teachers are fully confident in implementing the new curriculum. Subject leaders have valued the opportunity to conduct joint lesson observations with consultants but there has been too little follow up. The local authority recognises that staff need further professional support and plans are well advanced to engage a leading practitioner to model good practice.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by eliminating inadequate teaching, setting focused learning objectives and planning tasks which are well matched to pupils' abilities.