

25 September 2008

Mr Paul Whaling
Headteacher
Rishton Methodist Primary School
George Street
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Dear Mr Whaling

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 24 September 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. I was very grateful to the staff, governors and local authority (LA) advisers for giving up their time and, in particular, please thank the children that I met for their friendliness, good manners and helping me find my way around the school.

During the previous inspection there was an acting headteacher who stayed with the school for two terms. You have now taken up the post of permanent headteacher from 1 September 2008.

As a result of the inspection in February 2008, the school was asked to:

- raise standards and improve achievement throughout the school, but particularly in reading among the boys at Key Stage 1
- improve the planning of the curriculum to show clearly what pupils should learn each year and how their progress will be tracked
- improve teachers' understanding of standards expected of pupils in each age group and their skills in assessing pupils' learning.

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

Overall, standards remain very low. The progress that most pupils make in their lessons is insufficient to enable them to catch up in their learning so that their standards are closer to those expected of similar pupils nationally. Data analysed and pupils' work seen indicate that more than a third of pupils made little or no progress in the second part of the last academic year. Pupils in all classes

underachieved but in each class there was a minority of pupils whose achievement was better, particularly pupils in Year 6 and those who benefited from targeted intervention strategies.

Monitoring of the school's work by the LA correctly identifies that there have been some positive changes to the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Behaviour continues to improve and pupils are more engaged with their learning. They appreciate teachers' use of interactive white boards to make learning more active and relevant. Marking is more targeted so that pupils have increased understanding of what the next steps should be to improve their work. Teachers' planning shows greater awareness of pupils' different starting points so that activities are better matched to pupils' needs. Teaching assistants work effectively with groups and individual pupils. A minority of teachers are now confident to plan independent, problem-solving opportunities for pupils which enable them to take more responsibility for their learning. However, these improvements in teaching and learning have not yet made sufficient impact on pupils' outcomes to narrow the gap in achievement: other aspects of teaching and learning remain areas for development and the proportion of good teaching is too low. Pupils are not clear about their learning objectives; they lack resources to develop their literacy skills; planning does not make consistently effective use of information about pupils' prior attainment; gaps in teachers' subject knowledge mean that their explanations sometimes lack clarity and pupils' learning is not supported in a stepped way. Too few teachers routinely use a wide range of strategies to assess learning and their questioning is insufficiently probing. As a result, their skills in judging the standards reached by pupils are not sufficiently well developed to make their judgements secure. Most significantly, too few teachers have high enough expectations of what their pupils might achieve and this lack of challenge slows their progress.

There have been improvements to the planning of the curriculum. Teaching staff and leaders and managers now know what is being taught and when and there is adequate planned coverage of all subject areas. Improvements in behaviour management and subject leaders' confidence are helping teachers to broaden their styles of teaching. However, there are too few opportunities for teachers to see best practice in subject teaching or to enrich the curriculum by making creative links between subjects. Systems of assessment and tracking pupils' progress through the curriculum are in their infancy. Leaders have identified the core curriculum as a priority and this is well judged given the school's current context.

The school is emerging from a long period of staffing instability during which new procedures could not become embedded or impact on achievement. The support from the LA is strong. It knows the school well, has effectively tailored its support and set challenging targets for improvement. Governors are committed and knowledgeable. They have applied demanding recruitment criteria to enable them to appoint you as the new headteacher. You have quickly established accurate views of where the school is now and where it needs to be: you prioritise well. The deputy headteacher, working in partnership with the LA, has also strengthened leadership. These factors contribute to the small shoots of improvement seen. Staff increasingly

discuss the methods and activities of teaching; governors, leaders and managers are committed to raising standards; relationships at all levels within the school are positive and the ethos of learning is growing.

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

Yours sincerely

Sonya Williamson
Her Majesty's Inspector