

16 July 2008

Mr N Banwell
The Headteacher
Buckfastleigh Primary School
Bossell Road
Buckfastleigh
Devon
TQ11 0DD

Dear Mr Banwell

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

Following my visit to your school on 8 and 9 July 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since the previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

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 Children's Services for Devon.

Yours sincerely

David Townsend
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF BUCKFASTLEIGH PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection: 8 and 9 July 2008

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and talked to pupils, teachers, governors and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, the new headteacher has taken up his post. Some classes have been taught this year by temporary postholders and some subjects have been managed by temporary subject leaders. Recently, the governors and headteacher have made staff appointments which will markedly increase the number of permanent teaching staff in place for September.

Achievement and standards

When they start school, children's knowledge, skills and understanding are similar to those found nationally. The proportion of children working at age expected levels by the time they start Year 1 is higher than seen nationally. The daily teaching of phonics is well structured and resourced and children are given effective instruction that builds well upon their different starting points. The progress each child makes with their pronunciation of sounds and ability to use phonics for spelling is carefully assessed in lessons.

Standards have risen over time since the school's inspection in 2006 when standards were below average. At the end of Year 6 this year, the proportion of pupils reaching the level expected for their age in mathematics and science was similar to last year, when results were broadly average. The number of higher achievers in each subject is slightly lower than seen nationally, although more pupils reached above average levels in science this year than in 2007. However, pupils' writing scores were disappointing and, as a consequence, English standards are below average.

Results in Year 2 have also improved since 2006. This year, reading scores are similar to 2007 when results were broadly average. Around three quarters of the class reach average levels in mathematics and the numbers reaching the higher levels increased in 2008. However, in writing, too few pupils reach the average levels and standards look to be below average.

The unsettled staffing situation has contributed to a mixed picture in terms of the progress made by pupils over the last year. Too many pupils in Years 2 to 6 have not made the accelerated progress required in order for them to catch up lost ground, especially in writing and mathematics. This includes some pupils with learning

difficulties and/or disabilities. Systems for identifying and tracking pupils who may have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not yet sufficiently robust. However, senior leaders have convincing evidence that underachievement is currently being stemmed, for example in Years 4 and 6 where many pupils made good progress in recent weeks. Also, a positive picture is emerging in the classes for the youngest pupils. Most children in the Reception class and pupils in Year 1 made good progress this year. Similarly, achievement in science is improving. Pupils across the school are making satisfactory progress in developing their scientific knowledge and enquiry skills and most reach at least age expected levels.

Leaders are tracking pupils' progress very carefully now and have moved quickly this term to act on their findings about emerging weaknesses. In numeracy, decisive steps have been taken to identify less confident pupils and offer them additional focused teaching in small groups. In literacy lessons, there has also been an increased emphasis on ensuring pupils understand and can apply in their own work the key features of each key type of writing.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- raise pupils' standards and achievement, especially in mathematics and science, by improving teaching and the curriculum to ensure that pupils have work that is suitably challenging and interesting – satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Personal development and well-being remain satisfactory. There are some emerging strengths. Pupils at Buckfastleigh enjoy keeping fit and active and readily participate in a range of sporting clubs and events. Pupils behave well in lessons and around school. Playtimes are typically a positive experience for all, especially since pupils have had opportunities to help raise funds to purchase additional playground equipment. They now have a wider range of activities to enjoy together at break times.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning continue to improve. The proportion of good teaching, especially in classes taught by permanent staff, has increased since the last monitoring inspection. No inadequate teaching was observed. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have made accurate evaluations of the practice across the school and identified and agreed with staff the correct priorities for improvement.

Teachers are using planning guidance carefully to help them establish generally appropriate levels of challenge for pupils of all abilities. Explanations are clear and enhanced by the staff's confident use of computer whiteboards to display learning objectives and resources. Teachers are working hard to increase the levels of participation for pupils in lessons, for example by asking them to reflect on their learning by discussing with 'talk partners'. An increased range of strategies are used to assess pupils' understanding during lessons and to encourage pupils to evaluate their own learning and that of their peers. Relationships are good and teaching assistants provide sound additional support to individual pupils and groups. In the

number of lessons where teaching remains satisfactory rather than good, the pace of learning drops because these are too teacher led and the expectations of what each ability group might achieve are not fully shared with the pupils.

Teachers are more confident now at evaluating pupils' levels of achievement. The staff have worked well together and with colleagues from partner schools to verify their own judgments. They are beginning to use these assessments and the school's charts for tracking pupils' progress to help them with their subsequent planning and decisions about teaching, although there remains some lack of confidence in this.

The pupils' workbooks are regularly marked and useful advice is given to pupils about how well they have met the learning objective. They are given curricular targets setting out what they need to do to improve their work. However, the effectiveness of this approach has lessened in recent months. These targets are not always sufficiently linked to teachers' ongoing assessments or reviewed often enough to have sufficient impact in helping pupils make accelerated progress.

Cross-curricular links between subjects are underdeveloped. The school is working hard to establish further opportunities for pupils to apply their basic skills in literacy and numeracy through engaging 'hands-on' activities in other subjects.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- improve the accuracy of assessment and its use to set targets for pupils so that they know the next steps to take – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Since taking up post, the new headteacher has won the respect and trust of staff and pupils alike. He has quickly established good links with both families and community groups, including the local pre-schools. He has taken account of a range of information and is establishing a clear and accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Working closely with the governors, he has also taken steps to evaluate the school's organisational structure and moved decisively with the governors to make arrangements for increased staffing stability for the autumn term.

Until recently though, the uncertainty around staffing has impeded the rate of progress. The self-evaluation form, which has now been updated, remains a work in progress. The school has had to rely on new and temporary subject leaders and afford them time and support to develop their skills in these roles. They have worked well this term to establish a fuller picture of pupils' learning needs and the quality of provision in their areas. However, there remains much to do to complete this review so that senior staff can finalise the school improvement plan and implement further strategies for raising achievement. Nevertheless, the headteacher does have a clear view of the key priorities and has shared these with staff. The fact that two of the temporary subject leaders are taking up their roles on a permanent basis is already having a positive effect on morale and continuity in planning.

Senior leaders recognise that, whilst standards and teaching have improved, the pace of change has been less marked in terms of securing improvements to the rate

of all pupils' progress and to teachers' use of assessments. The momentum has picked up again recently and clear strategies for promoting accelerated progress for pupils of all abilities are being formulated. Some approaches, such as the increased focus on involving pupils in their own learning, are already proving beneficial. However, it is too early to judge their full combined impact, particularly as some facets, such as the intended changes to staffing and planned curriculum enhancements, will not take effect until September.

The governing body remains fully committed to the school's development. Governors have an in depth knowledge of the context for the school's future development and are using this well to hold leaders to account.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- improve leadership and management by ensuring that the good work done in analysing the school's strengths and weaknesses is used to bring about change, in particular, improvements to the quality of teaching – satisfactory.

External support

Until recently, the local authority (LA) has been providing extensive support for both leaders and teachers. The advice offered to teachers has been effective in helping the school secure improvements seen in the consistency and quality of teaching and learning. The support given to leaders has also been well received and is helping new middle leaders, in particular, to grow in their roles. Consultancy and advice for leaders in school are set to continue. However, in the months ahead, through a process of continual review, the LA intends that its support will diminish in line with the school's improvement. Increasingly, the coaching and support that has previously been offered to class teachers by LA consultants is being coordinated through subject leaders and is being achieved by teachers working closely with their colleagues in other classes and from partner schools.