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9 July 2008

Miss Laura Dickson
The Headteacher
Houndsfield Primary School
Ripon Road
London
N9 7RE

Dear Miss Dickson

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HOUNDSFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Rob Crompton, Additional Inspector and Wendy Forbes, Additional Inspector to your school on 24 and 25 June 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 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

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 fourth monitoring inspection: 24 and 25 June 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher and associate headteacher, middle managers, the chair of the Interim Executive Board, a group of pupils and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Staffing has changed significantly since the last monitoring visit. An experienced interim senior team, including a headteacher and a part-time associate headteacher have been appointed for the current term. A start has been made to appointing key post holders for the substantive leadership posts in preparation for the new academic year in September 2008 when the move towards federation with Churchfield Primary School begins formally. Appropriate arrangements are in place to complete the appointments for the senior leadership team and will include two headteachers for each respective school and a chief executive for the hard federation governance of both schools. Two new supply teachers have replaced two temporary teachers. They have been offered a full and a part-time permanent contracts respectively which will begin in September 2008.

Achievement and standards

Since the last monitoring inspection, pupils' progress has been analysed in detail. The school's assessment information shows that children are making good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes. This is because there have been significant improvements in the provision since the last monitoring visit. A renewed focus on developing children's early social, literacy and numeracy skills is bearing fruit. Most children are on course to reach age related expectations by the end of the Reception year.

Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are making satisfactory progress. Although attainment remains below average, standards in reading, writing, mathematics and science have improved on last year. Pupils have more opportunities to practise and consolidate their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum, and the continuing focus on phonics has increased their confidence in reading and writing. Standards in science have improved because more attention has been given to developing pupils' investigative skills.

Careful tracking of pupils' progress in Years 3 to 6 indicates that many have not made sufficient progress. Although some pupils have built well on their previous attainment, too many have made little or no progress during the current academic year. High staff turnover and the historical weaknesses in teaching, particularly in Year 6, mean that pupils have marked time rather than moved forward. On the other hand, where the quality of teaching is consistently effective, more pupils progress at the expected rate. Assessment data show that achievement is better in Year 5 where

staffing has been stable and the quality of teaching better. Overall, achievement through Years 3 to 6 remains inadequate. Standards in Year 6, in English, mathematics and science, as last year, are exceptionally low. The weakest aspect of English is writing. Pupils are more aware of what they need to do to improve but many find it difficult to write independently without prompting from teachers about structure, grammar and vocabulary. A more systematic approach to teaching mathematics is providing more challenge and building pupils' confidence, but they have too many gaps in their knowledge and skills to reach average levels. Similarly, the impact of an increased emphasis on practical investigations in science is not yet reflected in overall attainment in the subject.

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

The school supports pupils' personal development well. Attitudes and behaviour in lessons and around the site were mostly satisfactory or better and relationships between adults and pupils were friendly and supportive. This is an improving profile from the previous monitoring visits. The pupils report that there is, 'significant changes in behaviour' since the new behaviour policy was introduced at the start of the current term. They understand the four levels of warning used when there is misbehaviour and the consequences when they step beyond the boundary. While a very small minority of pupils do not always concentrate well and co-operate with one another or with their teacher, behaviour has improved significantly and pupils spoken to said they wish to have, '...no lessons disrupted as they want to learn'.

Senior leaders have begun to work unrelentingly at improving attendance and punctuality. A new attendance policy has been issued outlining statutory requirements, the responsibility of parents, pupils and teachers in relation to improving it and the impact of good attendance on achievement. Intensive work with parents, rigorous monitoring of attendance and joint work with the education welfare officer is helping to reduce the long list of persistent absentees and pupils taken out of school for extended holidays during term time. Additional actions include court proceedings, issuing fixed penalty notices and parenting contracts. These actions are helping to make sure that attendance is continually improving. This term, attendance is broadly average for primary schools, a significant improvement on the figure for last term. Punctuality is also monitored well with the senior leaders meeting and talking to parents daily. Direct contact and dialogue with parents have led to an increasing majority of pupils arriving early for school.

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. Three lessons were good and one was outstanding.

To help improve the quality of teaching the school has secured the involvement of Churchfield School, with whom it will be linked in the future, to provide good

teaching role models for staff. The impact of this initiative was seen in the improvements in the delivery of lessons across the whole school. The involvement of the early years team and LA consultants has had a positive impact on the younger pupils in the Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2.

Improvements in lesson planning have resulted in programmes of work that are more structured and have a sharper focus on learning outcomes. The setting of objectives for learning and the sharing of success criteria is helping pupils to understand the purpose of the lesson and what is expected of them. Although most plans clearly indicate tasks that are tailored to pupils' needs, in practice, work does not always present sufficient challenge, particularly for the more able in Key Stage 2. In some satisfactory lessons, questioning is not used effectively to offer additional challenge and to assess progress, as some teachers are too eager to direct learning.

In the most successful lessons observed, questioning and discussion gave pupils the opportunity to extend their learning by thinking hard, listening to the views and ideas of others and investigating evidence, as seen in a Year 6 history lesson on 'Britain since the 1930s'. Activities take account of the ability of pupils, the level of interest and promote independent learning making it purposeful and fun. Pupils are beginning to be more interested in their learning and say they enjoy lessons; subsequently behaviour has improved in the majority of lessons. The best progress can be seen in lessons where teachers interact well with pupils.

Teaching assistants provide support that is well matched to the needs of pupils and are beginning to be involved in the planning and delivery of lessons particularly in literacy and numeracy. Further training has increased their confidence in supporting pupils' during lessons and in withdrawal groups.

The use of assessment data to identify pupils' needs is beginning to help teachers to set work that is pitched more accurately. However, the evaluation of pupils' results does not always focus specifically enough on how to provide them with sufficient challenge in their learning. Since the last inspection, there have been some improvements in the quality of marking. While some marking gives good advice to pupils on what they need to do to improve, some merely provides them with information about how well they have achieved without ensuring that they understand the next steps in their learning. Marking remains inconsistent and the quality of presentation remains poor in some classes.

The Foundation Stage is well organised and pupils now enjoy a good balance of adult and child initiated activities. Improved and well focused teaching now ensures that children can benefit from lessons where work is very well matched to their needs with teachers concentrating sharply on learning outcomes. The magic that has most recently returned to both the nursery as well as Reception classes provide a vibrant learning environment in which children are beginning to be nurtured, their learning improved and their talents recognised.

Significant improvements have been made in the curriculum in the Foundation Stage. The provision is now good. In keeping with recent national guidelines, there is more

emphasis on developing children's independence. Imaginatively designed topics ensure that all areas of learning are thoroughly covered. Indoors, resources are very well organised and provide a wealth of stimulating activities that engage children. Good use is made of the outdoor areas which offer a wide range of learning opportunities.

In Years 1 and 2, pupils benefit from a carefully structured curriculum, which increasingly makes links across subjects. There are better opportunities for pupils to improve their literacy and numeracy skills in contexts that appeal to them. A daily programme of phonics work has increased pupils' ability to tackle new words and has improved their confidence in writing. Staff recognise the need to review the balance of time spent on this structured approach, which does not engage all pupils, and on more varied literacy lessons. Emphasis is increasingly given to investigative work in science. The impact of improvements to the curriculum is evident in the improving standards reached by Year 2 pupils in English, mathematics and science.

In Years 3 to 6, progress has been made in achieving a common approach to teaching English. Planning now routinely includes success criteria and key questions, and identifies how the needs of different pupils are to be met. Teachers have benefited from the introduction of a structured mathematics scheme, which helps to ensure all aspects of the subject are covered. More emphasis on practical work in science means pupils are now enjoying the subject and improving their investigative skills. Few links are made across subjects, however, which means there are limited opportunities for pupils to practise and consolidate basic literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills in a range of contexts. In general, the curriculum in Key Stage 2 has improved but the impact of the new initiatives is not yet evident in pupils' achievement by the end of Year 6.

Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and pupils at an early stage of acquiring English has been rigorously reviewed and effectively re-organised.

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

- improve the quality of teaching. In particular, raise teachers' expectation 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 interim and associate headteachers, backed up by the headteacher and deputies of Churchfield School and the local authority, continue to set the right direction for the school. They have quickly stamped their mark on the school and impressed on staff the urgent need to move the school forward. Together, they have identified the most basic weaknesses that have prevented the school from moving forward. This dynamic senior team does not flinch from making difficult decisions when they are needed. For example, they have made a significant contribution to organising staffing and training for the start of the new academic year. Arrangements for succession planning are good, which will enable a smooth transition. Although there

is still more work to do, teachers report confidence in the interim manager's leadership; they appreciate the opportunities for development, their openness and accessibility.

The senior team's evaluation of the school's work is robust and they have successfully conveyed the steps that staff need to take in order to accelerate pupils' progress. As a result, leadership and management have begun to have a significant effect on the quality of education provided by the school. For example, there is now more focus on teaching and learning and thorough systems are in place for monitoring lesson plans, providing feedback and support when lessons are inadequate or satisfactory. In most cases, targeted support for teachers who need to improve their practice is beginning to have impact. With the support of the LA, the interim leaders are taking firm action to deal with some of the weakest teaching. Training in the most basic teaching techniques such as setting homework, marking and effective questioning to improve pupils' progress is leading to teachers gaining a better understanding of pupils' progress. Teachers are now clear about the progress being made by pupils because of the systematic approach to gathering and using data, moderating work and identifying underachievement at an early stage. While many of the changes are new, the systematic approach to monitoring teaching and pupils' work is enabling senior staff to assess the impact of improvements to the quality of teaching and learning.

The leadership of the school is very clear about the progress currently being made by pupils. Different kinds of support, including for example, opportunities to visit successful practitioners at Churchfield School, other local schools and working with consultants, have been put into place to help all pupils make better progress. The leadership team has been highly effective in responding to the demands of improving provision for pupils quickly; in turn, they have helped to develop teachers' confidence to rise to the challenges. The senior team has provided training opportunities for non-teaching staff that is enabling them to offer better support for pupils. The school has no permanent middle managers but has appointed three to start in September 2008 at the same time as two new deputy headteachers.

A rolling programme of improvements to the buildings, which are poor in some areas, is being discussed with the LA in preparation for the start of the new academic year.

The interim executive board works very closely with the school. The chair visits the school regularly and holds the senior leaders to account. Minutes of meetings indicate that improving the quality of provision is consistently debated and discussed. The interim executive board has been very involved in developing the federation; detailed consultation with Churchfield School and parents has ensured that the interest of pupils and parents are paramount to decisions.

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 – good

External support

The LA continues to provide very good support for the school and has been instrumental in using various resources. For example, this includes financial and advisory support in relation to improving the quality of provision. The LA has also worked very closely with the school on staffing issues and setting up suitable structures for the federation. As a result of previous monitoring visits and the regular reviews from the school improvement partner, officers have responded swiftly to the school's needs. Continuing support is leading to improvements in teaching being sustained with significant developments in the curriculum and leadership and management. This has also been possible because the joint school and LA long term plan is reviewed regularly; it identifies clear expectations of what the school should achieve with appropriate recommendations for the end of the current school year. While the LA is holding the school to account well with evidence of impact of actions, the expected outcomes in areas of work such as achievement and attendance do not have measurable success criteria.

The LA is making a significant contribution to the transitional phase and has taken suitable actions to review the fears of parents and governors by assuring all that proposed plans for the school will improve outcomes for pupils. The LA has undertaken to ensure that the good work of consultants will continue. Financial support is also secure.