

Prospects Learning Services Ltd
Prospects House
19 Elmfield Road
Bromley, Kent
BR1 1LT

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 020 8315 1250
Direct F 020 8315 1279
Bradley.Simmons@ofsted.gov.uk



10 February 2009

Ms Kim Beat
Headteacher
Braintcroft Primary School
Warren Road
London
NW2 7LL

Dear Ms Beat

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Braintcroft Primary School

Following my visit with Sue Vale, Additional Inspector, to your school on 24 and 25 September 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 November 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 governors and the Director of Children's Services for Brent Council.

Yours sincerely

Bradley Simmons
Her Majesty's Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of Braintcroft Primary School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 24 September 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work over two days, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, staff, governors, including the chair, and a representative from the local authority (LA). Inspectors talked with a number of pupils from different classes as they worked and played around the school.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, a second deputy headteacher and three newly qualified teachers have been appointed. All senior staff are on permanent contracts, and all classes bar one have permanent teachers. With the exception of the Foundation Stage leader, who moved from the Nursery to a Reception class in September, all teachers across the Early Years Foundation Stage are new in post. From September 2008, the Foundation Stage leader's line management responsibilities have been reduced and now encompass staff working in Reception classes only. Several staff across Key Stages 1 and 2 have changed year groups this year. Three newly qualified teachers joined the school in September 2008.

Achievement and standards

Those children who left the Early Years Foundation Stage to join Year 1 this September made poor progress in their Reception and the Nursery years because they were taught inadequately. As a result, these pupils have started Year 1 with levels of skills, abilities and knowledge that are exceptionally low for their age. For example, during this inspection, over fifteen percent of this cohort were unable to say the sound made by many letters.

Across the rest of school, progress made by pupils, although still inconsistent, continues to lift, particularly in the increasing number of classes where teaching is stronger. The majority of teachers are now clearly aware of the pressing need to quicken pupils' progress. Unvalidated results for those pupils at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 in July 2008 demonstrate that pupils' attainment was low overall and all key targets for these cohorts were missed.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- raise standards, initially in English and mathematics, by accelerating pupils' progress – satisfactory

Personal development and well-being

The behaviour of pupils around the school is satisfactory. In lessons, the majority of pupils are attentive and show a keenness to learn. They participate fully in class discussions and are willing and eager to offer their opinions.

Attendance for the year that the school was placed in special measures was below average. The school has appointed a part time administrative assistant, who now chases attendance issues. Families are now contacted where possible on the first day that a pupil is absent. The school encourages attendance through a new range of rewards and celebrations. The LA school improvement partner has provided good support in this area and ensured that there are close working relationships with the education welfare officer. The result of this work is that attendance levels are now broadly satisfactory.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning across the school is slowly improving, although there remains a stubborn core of unsatisfactory teaching. Senior leaders and the local authority have a very secure view of the profile of teaching across the school. The majority of teachers use a common planning format for lessons, which clearly details learning intentions for pupils. Many plans are now satisfactorily geared to the needs of pupils with varying abilities including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, and pupils with English as an additional language. Planning now includes key questions to be asked by the teacher, key vocabulary pupils will learn, and the resources to be used. Importantly, lesson plans now contain precise timings with the aim of ensuring that lessons have good pace for pupils and that little learning time is wasted.

Although teachers consider which aspects of pupils' performance they will assess during each lesson, the quality of such assessment is inconsistent. Some teachers are simply not skilled enough in judging what constitutes embedded understanding in particular areas. As a result, they have an inflated view of pupils' performance. Questioning skills are still weak in all but the best lessons, so teachers do not test pupils' understanding incisively enough. They are thus not able to build on misconceptions, nor sufficiently challenge pupils of higher ability. In some classrooms, teachers do not brief teaching assistants adequately. During all stronger lessons, better briefing of teaching assistants is enabling them to make an improving impact on pupils' learning.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the school has worked assiduously to ensure that its chosen scheme for teaching systematic phonics is better implemented. This work is paying dividends in most classrooms, and the phonics teaching observed by inspectors on this visit had improved and was at least satisfactory. Pupils are accurately grouped by ability, and their progress through each phase of work is monitored effectively. The school is aware that closer

diagnosis of individual pupils' performance within each phase of phonics work is a priority.

The school has introduced a handwriting scheme. The implementation of this is at an early stage, and too few teachers are modelling the chosen handwriting script accurately or at all. Similarly, the implementation of the marking policy is inconsistent. Positively, there are now some examples of good quality marking, which diagnoses individual pupils' strengths and areas for development effectively, but this is by no means widespread.

Pupils in some classes do not seem to have sufficient opportunities for writing. In part, this is an issue to do with expectations of pupils' productivity; where pupils have written, they have not been expected to produce enough. In other instances, planned opportunities for writing do not appear to have taken place. Senior leaders are already checking planning. They know that they now need to follow this up by scrutinising pupils' work to ensure that pupils do enough writing to consolidate, hone and develop their skills.

The school's own monitoring, as well as evidence from this and the previous monitoring inspection, demonstrates that lessons in a small number of identified classes are consistently inadequate. Despite the support provided for these teachers by the school, pupils in their classes are not receiving the quality of education they need and to which they are entitled. In such cases, teachers have very low expectations of pupils' capabilities. They allow some tasks and activities to go on for too long without intervening to check pupils' understanding, build on their misconceptions and challenge them to do their best. They do not set out for pupils their expectations for excellence in terms of presentation of work and application to task. As a result, pupils' learning in these classes is unsatisfactory and they are not enabled to produce the quality of work of which they are capable.

Overall provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage remains inadequate, although the school is making progress towards tackling the underlying causes of weak leadership, now found only across Reception classes. A lack of attention and rigour in the leadership of the Foundation Stage has hampered progress towards improving the quality of provision in these classrooms since the last monitoring visit. Too few observations to determine what children know, understand and can do, and poor planning inhibit children from making adequate progress in their learning. Children are not being challenged or supported adequately in their learning. Their abilities are not being recognised or acknowledged because observations and assessments are infrequent and inaccurate and are not used to plan the next steps in learning. At the first monitoring visit plans were not relevant or up to date and this remains the case. This has been the position for far too long and is having a detrimental effect on standards attained by children when they enter Year 1.

Key staff working in Reception classes have lost confidence in immediate Reception line management. They feel frustrated and perturbed that their ideas and views are not taken into account. Individual sessions in two classes taught by teachers new to

the school are satisfactory and have the potential to be better, but the teaching within the third reception class is inadequate. An inspector followed two children from this class who were left alone and unsupervised for 15 minutes in the school building. This poor practice places the health and safety of children at risk and cannot be allowed to continue.

The Nursery is now under the leadership of the new deputy headteacher and is now staffed by two teachers new to the school. It has been transformed since the last monitoring visit. A bright stimulating learning environment is enhancing children's learning. Good, well thought out play activities alongside meaningful and sensitive adult support mean that children settle quickly into their new environment and are already making good progress in learning. The outdoor learning environment does not yet reflect the positive renovation of the indoor surroundings.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve teachers' use of assessment information in planning to meet the learning needs of pupils, including those in the early stages of learning English – satisfactory
- improve the quality of the provision in the Foundation Stage ensuring that planned activities are based on regular and systematic observations of children's learning – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The headteacher and governors have been wise to appoint a second deputy headteacher. Her arrival has strengthened the capacity of senior leaders to drive improvement. The transformation in the Nursery is a clear sign of the potential for change elsewhere, and particularly in Reception.

Procedures for monitoring teaching and learning are now good. Observations are regular, incisive and having an increasingly strong impact on improving teaching and learning. Where teaching is not improving, the headteacher is following clear procedures with all possible speed to ensure that the root causes of the problem are tackled.

Strategic assessment systems are now strong, enabling the school to produce progress and attainment data for each cohort of children. Senior leaders are aware that rigorous moderation of teachers' judgements of pupils' performance against National Curriculum levels is necessary to ensure that the assessment data produced is accurate.

The work of key governors in monitoring progress against issues for improvement is variable. Some governors have a clear view of their area of responsibility, visit regularly and ask pertinent questions. The chair of governors is hardworking and effective in his challenge and support for the school. Minutes of governors meetings demonstrate that the school is providing a good range of information on achievement and standards, but discussion and challenge about this essential area

appear to be limited. A few governors are not attending meetings regularly enough. These governors should consider whether they have the time to support a school in special measures effectively.

The school's revised improvement plan is well prioritised and focused. It includes measurable outcome targets, costings and clear arrangements for monitoring and evaluation.

One parent asked to meet with HMI during this inspection. Her child is in a class where teaching is usually strong. She spoke with satisfaction at the improvement she had seen in the school since the appointment of the headteacher, and noted the continuing strengthening of links with parents.

The headteacher is calm, purposeful and hard working. She has correctly prioritised the core task of tackling the stubborn core of unsatisfactory teaching and of eradicating continuing weak leadership of Reception classes. The resolution of these issues is now urgent in order that pupils are able to make the progress of which they are capable and reach their full potential.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- devise a rigorous approach to monitoring all aspects of the school's work and develop thorough systems, including analysing performance data, for evaluating the impact of provision on pupils' learning – satisfactory
- strengthen links with parents – satisfactory

External support

The LA link adviser, who is also the school improvement partner, continues to monitor the school's work effectively. As well as attending all full meetings of the governing body, he is actively involved in supporting the monitoring of teaching and learning across the school. His role in marshalling LA resources and support is good. He has been instrumental in improving the quality of service received to support the drive to increase pupils' attendance. He keeps a weather eye on the school and LA's work in dealing with competency issues.

The physical fabric of the building is improving, partly because the LA has earmarked modest funding to improve areas in particularly poor condition. Additionally, the LA is to be congratulated on the speed at which it has provided four brand new mobile classrooms to replace the inadequate terrapin huts seen by inspectors last term. It is encouraging to note that the LA has recognised that other deficiencies will require attention, and that it has earmarked funding to address these.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue decisive action to eradicate weak leadership of Reception classes and to improve teaching and expectations in those classrooms higher up the school where quality remains stubbornly low.