

6 March 2009

Mr Asif Arif
Executive Principal
Buglawton Hall School
Buxton Road
Congleton
Cheshire
CW12 3PQ

Dear Mr Arif

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BUGLAWTON HALL SCHOOL

Following my visit with David Muir HMI, and Michelle Moss, social care inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 March, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in October 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

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 Manchester.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Broomhead
H M Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF BUGLAWTON HALL SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 4 and 5 March 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including 10 lessons or parts of lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the executive principal of the federation, senior managers, pupils, parents, staff, members of the interim executive board (IEB) and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the inspection in October 2008 there have been changes to staffing and governance at the school. The LA appointed an IEB and this met for the first time in December 2008. In addition, two teachers have been appointed to teach English and mathematics, as well as two dedicated teaching assistants for these subjects. Appointments have also been made to care staff. The school is in the final stages of a building programme which will provide new residential accommodation. There are 33 pupils on roll; 28 are boarding and the other 5 are day pupils who, whilst on roll, do not actually attend the Buglawton Hall site because their provision is managed on a daily basis by another school in the federation.

Achievement and standards

Standards remain well below those expected for pupils' ages in English, mathematics and science. A small number of pupils are reaching average standards in aspects of some subjects, such as information and communication technology where some good progress is made in closing the gap on previously low attainment levels. However, the reliability of the school's assessment data is not secure and the school is in the process of reassessing pupils' reading, writing and numeracy skills. When complete, this will provide a more accurate baseline on which to judge pupils' standards and achievement in English and mathematics.

It is too early yet to judge the impact of the improvements made to the quality of teaching. In the lessons seen, the pupils were making satisfactory and sometimes good progress. They responded well to the good individual support and guidance they received and this helped them to concentrate better and so move a little closer to the standards they were striving for, for example in numeracy and creative writing.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2008:

- Raise standards and improve achievement in English and mathematics – inadequate

Personal development and well-being

Around school, behaviour is generally good. Although some pockets of disruptive and disrespectful behaviour were witnessed by inspectors, these were generally managed calmly by staff and did not significantly hinder other pupils' learning. Staff are sometimes unwilling to challenge inappropriate behaviour, which leads to some uncertainty and confusion about expectations of behaviour. Staff also need to be aware that the over-familiar language that is sometimes used in the school could give out confusing messages to pupils who need to understand the professional distance which needs to be maintained between staff and pupils. The enhanced handover procedures at the end of the day allow the education and care staff to communicate more effectively for the benefit of the pupils in establishing continuity and consistency.

The overall rate of attendance remains low at about 70%. Whilst this is affected by five poor attenders who are educated elsewhere, there are still an unsatisfactory number of pupils in the school whose attendance is below 80%. The attendance is poor despite the varied efforts of the school and external agencies to tackle this. There is a lack of clarity about lines of responsibility for the attendance of the pupils who are educated elsewhere.

The school provides discrete lessons of religious, personal and social education for all pupils. Recent work has focused on pupils gaining an understanding of other religions and places of worship. Displays around the school confirm the work that pupils have done in this area. The school has also organised visits to a range of cultural destinations, such as the Tate Modern, in London and the Tate Liverpool. Pupils from a range of backgrounds are encouraged to share their heritage and cultures with their peers through such activities as cooking food related to their home cultures. The school has also celebrated Black History Month. Despite this, no evidence was provided regarding the cultural needs of individual pupils.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2008:

- Ensure opportunities are provided for pupils to understand and appreciate the values and cultures of its diverse population – satisfactory

Quality of provision

There have been improvements to the quality and consistency of teaching, particularly in relation to planning and securing positive attitudes to learning. Teaching is now mainly good across the school, with over 80% of lessons seen on this monitoring inspection judged as good. This confirms the findings from the recent LA audit of teaching. However, teachers' planning does not yet identify individual pupils' abilities, needs and learning objectives and so it is difficult to be certain that each pupil is being appropriately challenged. In the better lessons, pupils are being encouraged to assess their own work and that of their peers. In the best lessons seen, teachers ensure a swift pace, a variety of activities and use their knowledge of pupils' abilities and interests to capture their interest and make learning fun. Behaviour is also managed well in class so that any potential for disruption is defused quickly and calmly.

Pupils are aware of their low literacy levels and this causes frustration for some when they are trying to complete tasks, particularly written work. The individual support available in lessons improves behaviour and concentration, and this leads to improvement in pupils' learning. However, the school needs to be more aware of the possible disruption and distraction that can be caused by adults coming into and going out of the classroom during lessons. Academic guidance and feedback to pupils lacks consistency, in terms of constructive evaluation and next steps for improvement. It is embedded in some subjects, such as art and is starting to be implemented in others, such as mathematics, but lacks consistency across all subjects.

The curriculum is becoming more flexible and responsive to pupils' needs and interests. There has been an increase in accreditation available to pupils this year and syllabi are being reviewed for their appropriateness. There is an increasing array of alternative qualifications available for students who can benefit from these, including animal husbandry and Duke of Edinburgh's award. The school has plans to continue to enhance the curriculum choice in coming years, including the introduction of courses with a more vocational focus.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2008:

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning – good

Care, guidance and support and boarding provision

Care remains fragile and volatile, hindering the rate of progress. There are ongoing weaknesses that significantly impact on the health, welfare and safety of pupils and extend to 12 of the 33 national minimum standards remaining unmet. The safeguarding procedures inclusive of recruitment and child protection are failing to protect pupils. Limitations in care and support remain in terms of the development of staff skills through training and in staffing levels to meet the needs of pupils. There is little progress in the administration of medicines and health surveillance. For example, medication records do not always secure correct information of what has been administered. Also, health plans do not capture how health concerns such as weight are to be monitored.

More positively, improvements are happening in some aspects of health and safety throughout the school, inclusive of fire safety. Pupils are confident in how they can raise concerns. However, they are less confident in how they are dealt with overall. There are continued shortfalls in securing a thorough and systematic recording system for behaviour. Also, there is little analysis of the trends, practices and patterns in the application of disciplinary measures within the school.

Pupils are encouraged and supported to maintain meaningful contact with their families and know they can seek help from staff. Relationships between pupils and staff are mutually respectful and communication between school and parents is suitable to foster effective links. The range of activities available to pupils to acquire

skills and pursue hobbies is reasonably broad. However, more individualised pupil choice is restricted by shortages in the deployment of staff care caused through staff absences and limited on-site options.

Pupils' welfare records are more open to scrutiny and their development in capturing the needs of pupils is making some progression, although the detail is not extending to how the diverse needs of pupils will be met. This continued shortfall restricts having an outline plan that both identifies the needs of pupils and informs staff on how best to meet them. However, care staff are getting more support and guidance through increased opportunities to receive supervision. Also, there is a marked increase in staff morale that is helping to stabilise the running of the school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2008:

- Improve the care provided to ensure the health, safety and well-being of pupils and staff, and ensure the school meets all boarding national minimum standards which were unmet at the time of the inspection in October 2008 - inadequate

Leadership and management

At the time of the inspection there were considerable weaknesses in the overall leadership and management of the school. External support from the LA, consultants and the federation has stabilised the school by providing additional leadership and management capacity, clarity of direction and an increased level of monitoring and scrutiny of the school's provision. The IEB has met regularly and has worked very effectively with the school and LA to carry out an audit of current provision and identify improvements needed in education and care. With support from LA consultants, the senior managers have drawn up a detailed action plan which outlines priorities to be addressed and the means by which these will be achieved. Senior managers are regularly reviewing progress against these plans, but their evaluations are sometimes overoptimistic. For example, they reported that all national minimum standards are now met, but this is not accurate. Pupils' behaviour is being monitored more closely but managers have yet to identify trends or patterns or the impact of particular interventions on reducing the number of incidents and physical restraints.

Some small improvements have been made to integrate education and care. Senior managers meet weekly and a timetabled handover from education to care staff has been introduced at the end of the school day. In seeking to address the serious weaknesses in provision for pupils' welfare and safety, senior managers have appointed a 'staying safe coordinator' to oversee this aspect of provision across the school. However, the appointee has not had all the training needed for this role, for example in relation to conducting risk assessments. Staffing levels within care remain a cause for concern because they are insufficient to meet and respond to pupils' needs.

Lesson observations are undertaken regularly. Senior managers' judgements about the quality of teaching are conservative compared with both the LA's and inspectors'

judgements. They recognise that the pro forma used in lesson observations is overly complicated and are seeking to review it.

Key appointments have been made to address weaknesses in English and mathematics. These include specialist teachers and subject-specific teaching assistants. Although these staff are new to post, they are already clearly focused on raising standards in these subjects. An external adviser is leading the work of establishing an accurate baseline assessment for each pupil in these subjects and this work is nearly complete. The senior managers responsible for education and care have welcomed and valued the advice, coaching, mentoring and close scrutiny they have received from external advisers and consultants. Staff morale at the school has improved.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2008:

- Secure the leadership and management of the school – satisfactory

External support

The LA has provided good and effective support and challenge to the school. Officers had already identified the weaknesses in leadership and management which existed at the school prior to the inspection in October. The LA had taken steps to improve governance by issuing a warning notice to the governing body in July 2008 and, since the inspection, officers have established an IEB which has the necessary expertise to support and challenge the school. The LA statement of action sets out clearly the actions it intends to take and the resources it will be providing. These include an appropriate range of consultancy and adviser time, some of which has already been very effective in helping senior managers to draw up a detailed school action plan. The LA support has been effective in increasing the pace of improvement and ensuring there is clarity of direction.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that staff receive the required training to meet national minimum standards, including child protection.
- Ensure that staff recruitment procedures fully meet national minimum standards.