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Mr P Wright
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wright

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BARLEY LANE SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 6 and 7 February 2007, 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 September 2006.

This letter 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.

Evidence

I observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, one of the assistant deputy headteachers, members of staff, the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

The substantive headteacher left the school in the summer of 2005, since when the governors, despite three rounds of interviews, have been unable to appoint a permanent replacement. An acting headteacher was recruited from a local special school and led Barley Lane along with her own school until January 2006. From this time until January 2007 two acting heads were recruited to share the leadership whilst also running their own schools on a

50/50 basis. Currently an experienced interim headteacher is in post on a contract for one year, after which time it is hoped the school will have gained some stability and a permanent replacement can be found. The headteacher has brought with him a deputy headteacher, who is not classroom based, to share the responsibility for taking the school forward. The cost of additional salaries for these posts is being met by the LA. One member of the teaching staff and the substantive deputy headteacher are currently on long term absence.

In September 2006 the school retained pupils into Year 10 for the first time and will continue to provide for pupils in Years 10 and 11 from next September. At this time, the current Year 6 pupils will move into Key Stage 3 and the school will be designated for secondary aged pupils only. This has implications for staffing and the curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 4. The school currently has 42 pupils on roll, which is its full capacity.

Achievement and standards

The monitoring of pupils' standards and the progress that pupils make is in the very early stages of development. The school recognises that a comprehensive system for recording information and storing data needs to be put in place as a matter of urgency. As a result, teachers are not able to provide the evidence to demonstrate the progress that pupils are making nor are they using objective data to set targets. For some pupils the expectations of what they are capable of achieving are too low and currently there is no means to challenge this. The assessment data that is held by the school is not accessible and has not been shared with teachers. No pupils in Year 6 and Year 9 sat the Key Stages 2 and 3 national tests last year as the school did not feel it was appropriate.

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

- ensure that pupils can achieve and make progress in all subjects through improving the effectiveness of teaching and the guidance given to them – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

The headteacher is striving to achieve an ethos where pupils have respect for their school and want to be there. Since January a comprehensive rewards and sanctions system has been put in place which is understood by both staff and pupils. There is evidence to show that it is proving effective. Pupils can now make behaviour choices because they understand that there are consequences to their actions. There is a cumulative reward system as well as immediate sanctions, such as the catch up room. Here pupils complete unfinished work or make up time missed when deliberately out of a lesson. Pupils value the certificates which they receive for achieving on the points

system and they are keen to take part in the off site activities which are the weekly reward for appropriate behaviour. The method for recording the use of sanctions enables the school to analyse pupils' behaviour and its likely causes. The headteacher recognises that the next step is to achieve consistency throughout the staff in awarding reward tokens and consensus as to what constitutes acceptable behaviour. This will be one of the focus areas during lesson observations after half term.

There have been no exclusions since the beginning of term which is a significant improvement on a similar time frame in previous years.

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

- improve the systems to support and guide pupils in their personal development, particularly in improving their behaviour – inadequate progress since the inspection, satisfactory progress since January.

Quality of provision

The system for recording unacceptable behaviour is in place and there is a process for monitoring and analysing other behaviours. The system for recording incidents involving the use of restraint has been reviewed and includes a formal process for debriefing those involved. During the half term holiday CCTV is to be installed in public areas. This will be invaluable to the school in monitoring areas which are isolated or difficult to see and in deterring vandalism and potential bullying.

The headteacher has clear expectations with regard to the quality of teaching he ultimately expects to see in the school. He knows where there is good teaching and where there are staff who need additional support to bring them up to this standard. Teachers' planning and marking have been scrutinised and observations of teaching are planned following the half term break. There is now an expectation that all lessons begin by setting a learning objective and that there should be some form of learning review at the end. Partly due to the lack of assessment information, most teachers are not differentiating their lessons sufficiently to meet the needs of all pupils. All pupils are now included in lessons within the main school.

For the first time, the school is now offering provision for pupils after the age of 14. The need to broaden the curriculum to include a vocational offer and life skills education has been recognised. Pupils in Year 10 are currently accessing courses at both the local college of further education and a nearby agricultural college. However, the accommodation, curriculum and the breadth of alternative accreditation will need to be expanded as pupils move into Year 11 and numbers post 14 increase.

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

- ensuring that pupils are always safe and that incidents of unacceptable behaviour are recorded properly – unsatisfactory progress since the inspection, satisfactory progress since January.

Leadership and management

In the 23 working days that the interim headteacher and deputy have been in post, they have quickly assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the school and written an action plan to move the school forward. They come with a wealth of experience and are disseminating the good practice they have previously developed, such as the behaviour management system. The senior leadership team has been extended to include the two assistant headteachers, two staff with additional responsibility points and the senior teaching assistant. The headteacher gives clear direction to the school and has been able to take the staff with him and maintain their commitment and enthusiasm. The staff expressed their willingness to work with the new headteacher and deputy because, 'They have a hands on approach and their strategies have already brought a greater sense of calm to the school.' Although he provides strong leadership, the headteacher also recognises the need to empower his staff by actively involving them in developments and encouraging them to discuss and make decisions. There is a recognition that there are no 'quick fixes' and that systems must be effective and secure if they are to become embedded and consistently used. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the performance of the school are undeveloped, which makes it difficult to hold staff to account. These systems are now being put in place but, as yet, it is too soon to test their findings or effectiveness.

In the first instance the focus for change has been on putting in place a behaviour management system which allows staff to take control. The headteacher has quite rightly put plans in place so that following the half term break the focus will shift to teaching and learning through a programme of planned lesson observations. This will also form the basis of the new performance management system for both teachers and support staff. Performance management has not taken place for the past two years and job descriptions are in the process of being written.

The chair, vice chair and at least one other long standing governor are to leave the governing body at the end of the spring term. The governing body has, by its own admission, areas of weakness and this makes the school vulnerable. There has not been a meeting of the full governing body since July, although a meeting is scheduled to take place on 15 March. The governors have found it difficult to hold the school leaders and managers to account during a period of turbulence and uncertainty.

The amount of change that new leadership has brought to the school since January cannot be underestimated and at this very early stage it would appear to be effective.

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

- establish more effective leadership and management to ensure that the school is monitored, evaluated and improved – unsatisfactory progress since the inspection, satisfactory progress since January

External support

The school has been identified by the local authority as a school causing concern on two occasions since 2000. This was the situation at the time of the last inspection. As a result, the school is currently in receipt of high levels of intervention both in terms of finance and support. Although the school has been supported by the LA in the past this has not always been effective in bringing about sustained improvement.

There is evidence to show that the LA is now monitoring the work of the school closely and is working effectively with the new senior management team to bring about improvement.

Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures is inadequate. However, there is clear evidence of at least satisfactory progress since the interim headteacher and deputy have taken up their posts. This is indicative that there is now capacity to improve.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Priorities for further improvement

- Embed new systems and ensure that they are used consistently.
- As a matter of urgency, establish a system for accurately assessing and monitoring progress so that learning targets can be set for each pupil.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Devon.

Yours sincerely

Pauline Robins HMI
H M Inspector