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12 March 2008

Mr M McCourt
The Headteacher
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Barley Lane
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Dear Mr McCourt

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BARLEY LANE SCHOOL

Following my visit to your school on 4 March 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 September 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – good.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steffi Penny".

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF BARLEY LANE SCHOOL

Report from the fourth monitoring inspection: 4 March 2008

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and talked with the staff, pupils, the chair of governors and representatives from the local authority.

Context

At the time of the monitoring visit the substantive headteacher had been in post for seven weeks. A permanent part time post of deputy headteacher (curriculum) and a temporary full time post of deputy headteacher (pastoral) have been created and appointments made. Supply teachers were covering the teaching work of four out of the ten teaching staff in their absence from classes. The major internal building works had been completed.

Achievement and standards

The progress that pupils make in all subjects continues to be regularly recorded. Where lessons use practical inputs, are topic based and use a variety of teaching styles and interesting resources, achievement based on where the pupil started is good. Overall, pupils do not achieve as well as they should. Standards remain well below those expected nationally for the age of the pupils.

Personal development and well-being

The central behaviour management tools and systems have been reviewed, developed and successfully relaunched. Consequently, there have been measurable improvements in pupil behaviour since the last visit. For example, since the autumn term the rate of physical intervention is down, the number of reported serious incidents has been cut by half, attendance has risen by 1.8%, and the domestic team report that the school is cleaner. The catering staff have also noted improvements in the atmosphere and behaviour at lunchtimes. The high profile that the headteacher has in corridors is part of his determination to be 'visible, supportive and affirming'. This is having a positive impact on pupil behaviour as well as encouraging staff confidence in his leadership.

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 – good.

Quality of provision

Support staff have learning as a very clear focus for their work in lessons. This is helping the pupils to make at least satisfactory progress where teaching is not good enough. In the lessons seen the pupils generally behaved well and completed their

given work. In a few lessons concentration slipped with pupils becoming frustrated. Consequently, their standards of behaviour dropped, hindering learning, such that they needed to be removed from the classroom in order to calm down. This happened because the purpose of the activity was not shared with the pupils and suitable resources were not made available. This is in part due to lack of sufficient detail in lesson planning but also to the availability of resources. The school is aware that the resources for science need to be audited and reviewed with the help of the local authority. The school would benefit from extending this to all curriculum areas and, in particular, noting how information and communication technology (ICT) is, and should be, used along with the interactive whiteboards.

In lessons greater emphasis is now being placed on practical activities that are well designed and this is helping the pupils to learn. At times the impact is hindered because the activities are not recorded carefully enough so that successes can be displayed, at others the follow up work involves inappropriate copy writing from textbooks. The school does not sufficiently share examples that could improve practice. For example, rather than getting the pupils to copy out chunks of text, one teacher had written instructions into pupils' books and had stuck in illustrations and tables whilst leaving spaces for the pupils' comments, writing and examples. This helped the pupils to concentrate on the content of their work rather than worry about presentation, whilst providing them with individualised good quality notes to revise from. At the earliest opportunity, all staff need to see and share examples of outstanding teaching in and across the different curriculum areas.

The standard and amount of work completed by an individual is still not sufficiently predetermined by the teacher. This is because, although pupils are aware of the longer term targets that teachers have set for them, staff have not sufficiently shared with pupils the smaller steps that they need to make in their learning in order to reach these targets.

Target setting is undergoing significant revision to ensure that the targets set are appropriate for individual subjects. The school has and will continue to provide opportunities to moderate pupils' work against that of pupils in other schools to ensure that the levels they give are accurate. They need to do this sooner than the current plans indicate.

The targets that are shared with pupils are now displayed on classroom walls in larger print so that it easier for them to read. However, not enough attention is given to them during lessons. The school is aware that the use of classroom walls as a learning resource as well as for display is inconsistent and not good enough. The planned training did not take place due to matters beyond the school's control. The school is also aware that the 'catch up' room is inadequate and not fit for the variety of purposes it serves. Ways to redress these issues are in hand, although not yet fully resolved.

Vocational opportunities at Key Stage 4 are a strength on which the school has yet to build. There are some interesting developments planned to enliven the Key Stage 3 curriculum, for example the school garden and BMX track. There is potential to increase the amount of personalisation of the curriculum to better meet individual pupils' needs and prepare them for their future lives.

Records relating to child safety have been further improved. For example, the new leadership have ensured that there is now even greater rigour in the risk assessment and management of off site activities.

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 – satisfactory.

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

- ensuring that pupils are safe and that incidents of unacceptable behaviour are recorded properly – good.

Leadership and management

The new leadership team has a good understanding of the priorities and developments that need to take place in order for the school to be removed from a category of concern. Over the last seven weeks they have consolidated the work of the previous leaders. The new headteacher has the respect and confidence of the school community. He has quickly gained an understanding of the individual needs of pupils as well as that of his staff. For example, as well as sustaining the previous reward culture, there is now a more resolute and consistent application of consequence for inappropriate behaviour. This was in direct response to staff concerns that the system was too easily manipulated by children; along with their feelings that boundaries were being eroded and damaged thus diminishing rewards and success. He has created a senior leadership team that has a sense of purpose and direction. Increasing the formality and transparency around recruitment practices has also encouraged staff confidence in him. He models safe, calm, courteous and affirming behaviour in all his interactions with pupils and staff.

The construction of this senior team, although very new, has created a sense of stability within the school. Preserving and improving further the school's climate and hard earned greater calm and stability was the new headteacher's core priority. From this short period of consolidation, the school is now in a position to make the more significant, but necessary, changes that will help it to improve the life chances of its pupils. A significant aspect of this is the development of the roles and responsibilities of other managers within the school. Currently, the school and governors do not hold them sufficiently to account for pupil progress and achievements in the areas that they manage.

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 – good.

External support

The local authority provides good support both through its monitoring process and the intervention of subject consultants. It will need to continue working with, and support, the governing body and the new substantive headteacher.

Priorities for further improvement

No additional priorities were identified during this visit.