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Mr M MacCourt
The Headteacher
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Dear Mr MacCourt

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BARLEY LANE SCHOOL

Following my visit to your school on 17 June 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fifth 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

Steffi Penny

Her Majesty's Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF BARLEY LANE SCHOOL

Report from the fifth monitoring inspection: 17 June 2008

Evidence

The inspector observed the teachers and classes in lessons, scrutinised documents and talked with the staff and pupils.

Context

At the time of the monitoring visit a permanent full time post of deputy headteacher (pastoral) had been created.

Achievement and standards

The progress that pupils make in lessons has begun to improve. This is in part because the system for managing pupils' return to lessons has improved, so that they come back quickly and in an emotional position ready to learn. There are still considerable variations in the progress made between classes and subjects, but teachers now have a much sharper focus upon pupil achievement. Standards remain well below those expected nationally for the age of the pupils.

Personal development and well-being

The monitoring of unacceptable behaviour has improved through greater accuracy and frequency in formal recording. This has allowed the school to begin to determine patterns, identify probable causes and help resolve them. The school now provides two places where pupils can either be given or seek respite. One is a quiet space and the other is for those who are undergoing emotional outbursts. This is helping to improve behaviour, but is also having a noticeable impact on pupil progress in lessons. The school has a much calmer environment and pupils are far more relaxed with visitors. For example, some pupils initiated conversations with HMI about their work in design and technology, of which they were rightly proud.

Attendance differs greatly between pupils and for some it is not good enough. The school, with support from the local authority, is in the process of discussing whether Barley Lane is the right school for those who rarely attend and, if it is, how attendance can be improved to meet legal requirements.

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

More good and far fewer inadequate lessons were seen during the visit than on previous occasions. Where lessons are interesting, use a variety of appropriate resources, and are made relevant to the world outside school, pupils have good attitudes to learning and work well. Behaviour in these lessons tends not to be an issue because pupils are so interested and absorbed in what they are doing they just get on with their work.

Pupils demonstrate and say that they learn best from engaging in practical activities and using computers to support their work. Teachers are starting to make class work more practical, but care needs to be taken that the activity is appropriate to age. Not enough use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to extend and enhance learning. In particular, although some teachers use the whiteboards and projectors provided by the school, they are seldom used interactively or by the pupils. Some staff say this is because the hardware connections are not compatible and that pupils will abuse and damage the boards. However, when trusted with potentially dangerous equipment, pupils generally respond positively and safely. During the visit some of the computer software systems failed; the school is aware that it needs to investigate this.

In the best lessons seen, the classroom walls supported the work of the subject being taught because they are used as a learning resource. Good examples of supportive surroundings are the mathematics and English rooms. The multipurpose use of the art room is not reflected in its displays, which detracts from learning. Although it is very supportive for art lessons and sharing the work that pupils have done and are doing in art. Several other rooms do not support pupils' learning, the subjects taught in them or how to develop basic skills in numeracy and literacy. Where classrooms are the responsibility of a permanent member of staff they are more likely to be used as a good resource for learning.

Staff are beginning to share the good practice that exists in the school. Through the weekly 'what works for me' session staff not only learn from the presenter, but when presenting reflect on what they do well and where they could improve. Staff say that this is helping them to improve their teaching and inspection evidence supports their view.

Many teachers have worked hard at planning their lessons to create links with other subjects. This is very new and pupils do not fully understand how this will help them do better. The overall purpose of the lessons is being made clearer to pupils. However, targets are still not used effectively in most lessons to drive improvement. Targets for some of the more able pupils are not challenging enough because of this lack of focus. Throughout some subjects and in some lessons pupils are encouraged to think and learn for themselves as well as managing their own behaviour. This is not consistent enough across the school. Pupils use self-assessment for their behaviour points but seldom do so for the quality and amount of work that they have produced in class.

There is now a dedicated communication room for staff to record the monitoring of health, safety and behaviour issues, including serious incidents. The school has

devised and generated bound books for recording and communicating all relevant information relating to these areas, including a record of the resulting actions where relevant. These books are regularly used well, for example in staff briefing sessions. The use of this communication room has meant that staff briefings and meetings can focus on the core work of the school and not be overburdened by discussing low level domestic issues.

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

Leadership and management

The school improvement plan is directly related to the main points for improvement as indicated in the last inspection report. Along with other improvement and guidance documents it also refers directly to judgements raised in monitoring visits by HMI, the local authority and includes pupils' views. These documents have developed with the involvement of all staff with a consequence that most uphold the core messages and the beliefs that underpin them. The improvement and development plans are being followed well and targets have been met in the allotted timescales. The deep thinking and reflection of the headteacher ensure that the school is able to be more proactive than reactive so that all staff have more time to concentrate on improving and developing what they do.

Further delegation to the two deputies continues to help enhance their leadership and authority. They take their roles seriously and are now in a better position not only to help and support colleagues but to hold them to account for their work. Staff are reflecting more on the work that they do through self-assessment. The school is rightly moving to the next phase where lesson observations will be more rigorous to ensure that pupils do as well as they can all day and every day.

Governors continue to be supportive of the school. They have started to check pupil progress and achievements. It is too early to judge the robustness of their challenge and the impact this has had on raising standards and achievement.

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 for the school. Through its monitoring, particularly of attendance and the quality of learning in lessons, it has identified what the school needs to do to improve and how it, and other agencies, can provide further guidance and support. An example of this is through identifying that robust

support from health and social care agencies is not always provided to help address serious attendance issues. It intends to highlight this issue in a multi-agency forum and to the officer with the remit for children in care.

Priorities for further improvement

No additional priorities were identified during this visit.