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Mrs Janet Dolan  
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Dear Mrs Dolan

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF STONEBRIDGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

### Introduction

Following my visit with John Kennedy HMI and Michael Madden, Additional Inspector, to your school on 28 and 29 November 2006, 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 June 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

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership staff, a group of pupils, the vice chair of governors, a representative from the local authority (LA).

### Context

The headteacher resigned just before the end of the summer term. An acting headteacher joined the school in September on a short-term basis for the autumn term. There were no other changes of staff. One teacher is due to leave at the end of term. The governors were unable to appoint a substantive headteacher following a recruitment campaign. The LA and governors are negotiating terms for another period of acting headship until a substantive headteacher can be appointed, probably from Easter.

## Achievement and standards

Standards remain low and pupils are not yet achieving as well as they should. In the national assessments in reading, writing and mathematics in 2006, pupils in Year 2 achieved results that were higher than those of 2005, but much lower than local and national results. Results in mathematics were close to local figures. Results in tests at Year 6 also improved in mathematics and science from a very low figure in 2005 and fell slightly in English. The school did not meet its targets and results remain low in comparison with the local and national picture. Overall, girls tend to achieve better than boys. Progress in all three subjects is inconsistent with too many pupils failing to make the progress that could be expected from Year 2 to Year 6.

In lessons, pupils' modest progress in English is rooted in the lack of a secure foundation in basic writing skills. The national literacy framework is reflected in teachers' planning but dependent on the skills and knowledge of teachers to interpret it accurately. Likewise, in mathematics, unit plans are used and, at best, adapted to the needs of the class. At worst, there is an over reliance on the use of commercial texts books which offer little scope to meet the different learning needs of pupils. At the top of the school, pupils' lack of some basic skills and knowledge, for instance in place value and number facts, hinder their ability to tackle the tasks set. The support for pupils with learning difficulties and for those who are learning English as an additional language is very variable and, in some lessons, is insufficient to enable them to make progress.

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

- Raise the achievement of all pupils, especially average and lower attaining – inadequate progress.

## Personal development and well-being

Most pupils enjoy school and have positive attitudes to learning. Most listen attentively in lessons, are keen to please their teachers and respond well to praise. Pupils from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds get on well together. On occasions there is spontaneous applause for pupils when they make a positive contribution to a lesson. There are harmonious relationships between pupils who express few concerns about bullying or poor behaviour. Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is generally good but it becomes unsatisfactory where teaching is inadequate. Some pupils become less attentive and make limited progress when they do not understand the task they have been given or the lesson lacks pace. At times, the directed nature of the teaching prevents pupils from being independent in their learning. Poor attendance by some pupils hampers their progress and continuity of learning. Some classes have particularly poor attendance. Attendance rates have fallen

since the inspection in June 2006 and the rate of unauthorised absence has risen to a high level.

### Quality of provision

Teaching and learning remain inadequate. They were satisfactory and occasionally better in the upper part of Key Stage 2, but elsewhere too variable. The teachers draw on well-established national schemes of work to plan lessons with a clear structure and with specific objectives. They use a range of resources to direct the pupils' considerable natural interest into conventional classroom activities. In most lessons, these are varied to a degree to reflect the range of pupils' capabilities and prior attainment. In some lessons, learning assistants make a strong contribution to the engagement and progress of pupils who have additional language or learning needs. The best teaching and learning was with groups of pupils in a class or withdrawn for special support; in those circumstances the pupils made good progress as a result of well-focused and demanding activities. More generally, however, significant numbers of the pupils make only modest or too little progress in lessons. Teachers' expectations about the depth of pupils' engagement are, in the main, too low. In many lessons, directive styles of teaching or closely prescribed tasks restrict the demands and responses of more capable pupils and, at times, also restrict the role of learning assistants. Pupils' progress was unhelpfully limited where the lesson's objectives were, in reality, activities planned and conducted without sufficient reference to the intended learning outcomes. The staff recognise the wide range of capabilities and needs in their classes and, at times, they identify what all must achieve in a lesson and higher attainments that some might reach. They do not always, however, plan appropriate degrees of stimulation and support to ensure the higher attainment. Significant numbers of pupils remained confused in lessons where new learning was not clearly explained. The pace of work was rarely planned in detail. Where classroom management was not sufficiently alert the pace of work became too slow, particularly where lessons were also over-long. Pace was sometimes slowed unnecessarily by routines such as writing out barely understood learning objectives. The closing plenary was a victim of this lost time and lessons ended abruptly.

The school is providing teachers with more information about the pupils' attainment, and setting more ambitious targets for the pupils' progress from year to year. Whole-school assessment procedures are being developed but information is not used systematically in planning lessons to match work more closely to the needs of all pupils, especially the large majority who have English as an additional language. Nor is assessment contributing to the encouragement and recognition of achievement. At best, teachers' responses to the pupils' work are frequent but not enough provide constructive advice to help individuals improve their attainment.

Although a start has been made in tackling weaknesses in the Foundation Stage there is still a long way to go to ensure that provision is consistently satisfactory. The LA has given considerable support to the new Foundation Stage leader who was appointed from within the staff in September. She is committed and working hard to develop her role, but lacks experience of working with this age group. New planning formats have been introduced. Systems for observing and assessing what children know and can do are still developing. The quality of observations is variable and their use in planning a range of stimulating activities appropriate to children's needs is not secure. Daily activities lack variety and their planning and management is not sufficiently sharp to ensure an appropriate balance of child initiated and adult-led work. It is not always clear what adults expect children to learn from the activities on offer. The development of the outdoor provision has resulted in children having increased opportunities for choice. The planning, organisation and management of the indoor and outdoor space needs further consideration, as does the deployment of adults to certain activities to ensure that supervision is adequate at all times. Staffing levels are at the absolute minimum given the age and needs of the children, and stretches the capacity of the adults to foster learning. Adults are not always alert to what is going on around them and the time spent relating to children in a meaningful way is limited. Issues about the quality of teaching remain. The quality of interaction between adults and children is inconsistent.

Classroom behaviour is mostly well managed and, as a result, the school has broadened the remit of its learning support unit (LSU), which had focussed on providing 'time-out' for pupils who had misbehaved. The LSU now provides more focussed support for pupils with specific learning needs. This is in its developmental stage and does not benefit from clear guidance on the withdrawal of pupils from lessons. As a result, support is not clearly linked with teachers' planning and pupils miss out on some class activities. Individual education plans are inconsistent in quality. Targets are sometimes too broad and additional support is not closely focused on pupils' needs. Insufficient steps have been taken to manage, monitor and evaluate support for pupils who have English as an additional language. As a result, these pupils are not catered for successfully. Information about their language development is not gathered systematically or regularly enough to be used to plan effective interventions. Good support from some learning assistants enhances pupils' learning but the quality of support is very variable. There are inconsistencies in how effectively assistants are deployed in lessons. Often this valuable support is not well enough targeted to help achieve specific learning objectives for particular pupils.

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

- Ensure that the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory across the school and share the best practice more effectively – inadequate progress.

- Improve the quality of the curriculum and management in the Foundation Stage – inadequate progress.

### Leadership and management

The acting headteacher, supported by the LA, is providing good leadership and has started to make changes. Staff absence has been tackled successfully, teaching is evaluated rigorously and each teacher has targets for improvement. Other important initiatives include a change in the character, focus and impact of the LSU, improving the management of pupils' behaviour and encouraging further development of assessment to track pupils' progress to support learning. Staff are collaborating in a new professional spirit. They have contributed to the preparation of a new mission statement and to the writing by the acting headteacher of a school improvement plan. The plan addresses the issues from the inspection and identifies broadly appropriate tasks. Importantly, it includes additional work to rebuild leadership and management. It sets down helpful success criteria though some could be more sharply drawn and identifies considerable costs in terms of staff time. Its overall timescale of a year reflects the urgency of the school's position but is unrealistic in view of the considerable changes yet to be achieved. It recognises the need for monitoring and evaluation but lacks appropriate lines of accountability as a result of the heavy reliance on the acting headteacher and LA to carry out the action.

Progress towards implementing the plan is satisfactory. The school is in the early stages of improvement and the planned work is being tackled systematically. In the absence of a new substantive headteacher, another acting headteacher has been found with the help of the LA. The intention is to induct them in good time for next term so that the plan can unfold to involve more of the staff in the management of change. At present, however, leadership and management are fragile. The school's own staff, at all levels, still need training in order to fulfil their management roles. There are also some gaps in management. Though morale is sound, the staff still lack the capacity to generate and maintain the momentum for improvement.

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

- Devise and implement a school improvement plan – satisfactory progress.

### External support

The LA's statement of action meets requirements and is satisfactory. Actions are well considered and responsive to the areas of greatest need in the school. The plan contains quantifiable targets, where appropriate, though some could be more sharply focused on outcomes for pupils. The target date for removal of special measures is ambitious and recognised as such by the

LA whose plan predates some changes in circumstances that affect the school's capacity to improve. A high level of support from consultants is rightly focused on developing the knowledge and skills of staff in key leadership roles. The continued emphasis on supporting improvement in the quality of teaching and learning through a second year in the Intensifying Support Programme builds appropriately on the previous high level of support that did not have the intended impact last year. The link inspector visits regularly and gives good advice and support to the acting headteacher in dealing with personnel issues, as well as supporting her monitoring of the quality of teaching. Regular strategy meetings between key LA personnel, the acting headteacher and members of the governing body evaluate the school's progress and the impact of the support. The LA has appointed an additional governor, experienced in working with schools causing concern, to support the work of the committed, but inexperienced, governing body.

### Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Induct a new interim manager and continue to build the capacity of the school's staff to fulfil their roles as leaders and managers.
- Improve the management of the provision for pupils learning English as an additional language.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the School Improvement Services for Brent.

Yours sincerely

Jane Wotherspoon  
H M Inspector