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15 May 2008

Ms Kim Beat  
Headteacher  
Braintcroft Primary School  
Warren Road  
London  
NW2 7LL

Dear Ms Beat

### SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF BRAINTCROFT PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Sibani Raychaudhuri and David White, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 7 - 8 May 2008, 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 November 2007. 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 be appointed subject to agreement from HMI.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies it may contain within 24 hours of its receipt.

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 Brent Council.

Yours sincerely

Bradley Simmons  
Her Majesty's Inspector

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF BRAINTCROFT PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 7 and 8 May 2008

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work over two days, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, several staff, the parents' forum, several governors, including the chair, and a representative from the local authority (LA). Inspectors talked with a number of pupils from different classes as they worked and played around the school.

### Context

The present headteacher took up post in January 2008, although worked on a part time consultancy basis for several weeks during the latter part of the autumn term 2007. There are two classteacher vacancies in Key Stage 1, and one in Key Stage 2. Additionally, one classteacher in Key Stage 2 and one further teacher are absent on sick leave. The Foundation Stage is fully staffed. A second deputy headteacher has been appointed to the school and takes up post in September 2008.

### Achievement and standards

At the time of the last inspection, achievement and standards across the school were judged to be inadequate. In the Foundation Stage this is still wholly the case. Across the rest of the school, pupils' progress, although still unsatisfactory, is slowly starting to lift. Some teachers are now displaying a clear focus on the need to accelerate pupils' progress. However, inconsistencies in teaching in several year groups mean that, overall, pupils are not making the progress of which they are capable in reading, writing and mathematics. Greatest progress is made by pupils in Year 6 where teaching is consistently strong. Standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, handwriting and mathematics remain too low throughout the school.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2007:

- Raise standards, initially in English and mathematics, by accelerating pupils' progress – satisfactory

### Personal development and well-being

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Pupils enjoy coming to school and generally show an interest in the activities planned for them. Most behave well in lessons and around the school but some become restless and disengaged from learning when teaching is dull or lessons proceed at too slow a pace. Evidence from the parents' forum suggests that, under the new management, pupils feel safe at school and that isolated incidences of bullying are dealt with increasingly effectively. Attendance is satisfactory. Since the inspection in November 2007, the school has been trying to improve punctuality but this remains unsatisfactory.

## Quality of provision

At the time of the previous inspection, teaching and learning were inadequate. During this monitoring visit, inspectors observed the vast majority of staff teaching. Inspectors largely confirm the school's and local authority's (LA) view of the quality of teaching across the school. Teaching remains inadequate overall, because it is not yet making sufficient impact on pupils' progress. There are, however, encouraging signs of improvement. Senior leaders have sensibly introduced a common format for planning lessons that all teachers were using during this monitoring inspection. Teachers are beginning to modify plans for groups of pupils with different levels of ability. Assessment, however, remains weak, particularly the regular assessment of pupils' early reading skills, including systematic phonics. This is not yet detailed or consistent enough to enable teachers to intervene effectively and rapidly to meet the needs of individual pupils who are falling behind. The school has been wise to introduce a new scheme ('Letters and Sounds') to improve pupils' basic reading skills. However, several teachers are not implementing the scheme rigorously. Some teachers were replacing or supplementing it with unnecessary resources which are potentially confusing for pupils.

During lessons teachers are now encouraging pupils to assess what they have learned using a thumbs up or down system. While this is potentially valuable, during weaker lessons, teachers do not test the validity of these self-assessments or follow up pupils' misconceptions. In many lessons pupils are encouraged to participate in role play or to discuss work with a partner, but teachers often miss opportunities to exemplify good speaking and listening skills. Handwriting is not well modelled by teachers in the great majority of classrooms.

In almost a third of lessons observed during this inspection, teaching was simply not challenging enough. Teachers' expectations here were too low and the slow pace of learning bored and discouraged pupils. A new marking policy has been introduced and some teachers now make evaluative comments and give clear pointers for the next steps in learning. Promising systems have been set up with the intention of providing better support for newly arrived pupils in the early stages of learning English. Teaching assistants are now taking a more active role across the school but, as members of the parents' forum noted, the quality of their interventions remains variable.

Provision with the Foundation Stage remains inadequate and is showing too few signs of improvement. At the most basic level, the learning environment in both nursery and reception classes is untidy and, in places, dirty. Some resources are outdated and unattractive. Better resources are often presented in a disorganised manner so that children do not derive maximum benefit from them.

Planning has improved insofar as a format is now used which is designed to detail the learning objectives which underpin the various activities on offer. However, these plans are not kept sufficiently up-to-date; the same activities appear in each early learning area month after month. Thus teaching assistants lack guidance as to the

purpose behind each learning activity and cannot pose focused questions in order to challenge children sufficiently, and to develop children's speaking and listening skills. As a result, the quality of adult interventions remains inadequate overall.

Although some observations of children's learning take place, these are too often focused on what children are doing, rather than on what they have learned and need to learn in future. Within both the nursery and reception classes, the school's chosen scheme for the teaching of early reading, including systematic phonics, is not being implemented with the rigour necessary to ensure that children get a flying start in this essential area. This lack of a firm foundation in reading, and thus writing, is the fundamental reason that pupils are underachieving higher up the school.

The planning of the school day needs to be much tighter for individual reception classes. This is for two reasons. Firstly, practitioners need to become much more accountable for the progress of children in their own class. Secondly, there are still too many children who wander aimlessly throughout all reception classrooms at times during the school day.

The Foundation Stage at Braintcroft was inadequate when inspected in 2001 and 2007. With the exception of two teachers, all other staff have been in the Foundation Stage since 2001, and the Foundation Stage has been under the same leadership since that time. The school must take radical action to ensure that leadership and provision within this key stage improves very discernibly before the next monitoring inspection.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2007:

- Improve teachers' use of assessment information in planning to meet the learning needs of pupils, including those in the early stages of learning English – satisfactory
- Improve the quality of the provision in the Foundation Stage ensuring that planned activities are based on regular and systematic observations of children's learning – inadequate

## Leadership and management

Senior leaders have begun to implement a range of potentially useful systems to keep the work of the school under review. As a result of these systems, they have a sound view of the quality of teaching and learning across the school. They are clearly aware that the time has come to act decisively to tackle the root causes of stubbornly unsatisfactory practice with the aim of delivering, as speedily as possible, the good level of teaching that pupils need and deserve.

A positive start has been made on implementing changes to planning and assessment systems. Regular monitoring of planning is making a good impact so tasks are more closely matched to the needs of different groups and abilities of pupils in English and mathematics. The school is currently implementing a new system to track pupils' progress, identify underachievement and set targets for individual pupils, groups of pupils, classes and year groups. Teachers have started to

level pupils' work at regular intervals so that their judgements may be used as part of the data that will inform this system. There is, however, some evidence that not all teachers have a clear understanding of the standards required for each national curriculum level. This skill requires improvement so that the new tracking proves sufficiently robust.

Governors are committed to the improvement of the school and take their responsibilities seriously. They are beginning to hold the school to account for its work, key issue by key issue, although this new found activity is in its infancy. Positively, the governing body is becoming more representative of the diverse community it serves.

The headteacher is highly experienced and inspires dedication from staff and loyalty from an increasing number of parents. She has wisely instituted a parents' forum with representation from almost every class in the school. Discussions with parents demonstrate that they are under no illusion as to the school's performance, and the parents' forum is proving to be a useful tool to develop accountability across the school. The Somali parents' group is giving one group of parents, who previously felt they were unheard, a voice and a greater stake in their children's education.

The school improvement plan is well focused on the key issues identified by the previous inspection. It includes measurable outcome targets, costings and clear arrangements for monitoring and evaluation. On present showing, some targets are very ambitious. To take one example, targets concerning securing improved quality of teaching and learning by the end of the spring term 2008 have not been achieved.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2007:

- Devise a rigorous approach to monitoring all aspects of the school's work and develop thorough systems, including analysing performance data, for evaluating the impact of provision on pupils' learning – satisfactory
- Strengthen links with parents – satisfactory

### External support

The LA had provided more than 111 hours of support to this school in the academic year preceding the inspection that placed it in special measures. The LA's challenge is now to check systematically the impact of its work in the school, and to hold the school rigorously to account for the implementation of its own improvement plan. The impact of the implementation of the LA statement of action is currently satisfactory in all key areas except that of improving provision in the Foundation Stage. In this area, the right support and advice is being delivered, but LA staff must report rapidly and fearlessly to individual staff, to the headteacher and to the LA link adviser when they judge that improvement on the school's part is inadequate because staff will not or cannot effect positive change.

The LA link adviser, who is also the school improvement adviser, is monitoring the school's work well, and acting as 'gatekeeper' to the LA's school improvement services. He is clearly aware of the need to provide challenge as well as support, in particular to ensure that the school tackles swiftly endemic problems with leadership

and teaching quality in the Foundation Stage and teaching quality within some individual year groups higher up the school.

Apart from general untidiness, the physical fabric of the building is poor. Although much of this issue is the school's responsibility, the building has clearly deteriorated over a number of years, and the LA has not held the school to account for its work in this area. The LA needs to consider all options at its disposal to bring the physical fabric of the building to an acceptable level.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the teaching, learning and assessment of early reading skills, including systematic phonics by ensuring the school's chosen scheme is rigorously implemented.
- Take decisive action to improve provision, expectations and leadership across the Foundation Stage and teaching and expectations in those classrooms higher up the school where quality remains stubbornly low.