



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Inspection report
Highters Heath Primary School

Birmingham Education Authority

Dates of inspection: 14-15 June 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

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Basic information about the school

Name of school:	Highters Heath Primary School
Type of school:	Primary
Status:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4 to 11 years
Headteacher:	Miss J Connor
Address of school:	Highters Heath Lane Kings Heath Birmingham B14 4LY
Telephone:	0121 474 2459
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	Reverend Eve Pitt
Local education authority area:	Birmingham
Unique reference number:	103365
Name of reporting inspector:	Mrs P Cox, Additional Inspector
Dates of inspection:	14-15 June 2004

Introduction

1. Highters Heath Primary School is situated in Kings Heath in the south of Birmingham. There are 209 pupils on roll, most of whom are of white British heritage and all speak English as their first language. Fifty per cent of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, a proportion that is more than twice the national average. Twenty eight per cent have been identified as having special educational needs, of whom two have Statements of Special Educational Need. This proportion is above the national average. The pupils' attainment on entry to the school is similar to that expected for their age.
2. The school was inspected in June 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in the quality of teaching, standards, the curriculum, assessment, monitoring and evaluation, and attendance.
3. The school was visited by an Additional Inspector in March 2004 to assess its progress.
4. In June 2004 two Additional Inspectors inspected the school, assessing the standard of education provided and the further progress the school has made.

Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school requires special measures, since it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. The main findings of the inspection are:
 - overall, standards in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 1 are below the national average and by the end of Key Stage 2 they are low. Most pupils' listening skills are satisfactory, but their speaking skills are weak and have not been developed well enough. Although many pupils in Year 2 read fluently at the expected level, their understanding of the text is less secure. Reading skills are not improved sufficiently through the school; standards in Year 6 are particularly low. At the end of Year 2, attainment in writing, even for the more able, is below that expected and few pupils in Year 6 write well-structured prose with accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation;
 - the picture is similar in mathematics and science. The proportion of pupils reaching the national expectations in Year 2 in mathematics is below average. Standards in Year 6 are low. Throughout the school, the pupils' grasp of addition facts and place value is insecure and, as a consequence, many make errors in calculation. Many pupils in Year 6 struggle when using large numbers and much work is completed slowly. The pupils have particular difficulty in solving mathematical problems. In science, pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 have completed work at the appropriate level for their age and some demonstrate a clear knowledge and understanding of the processes and relationships. However, their skills of scientific enquiry are underdeveloped;
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- the provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. There is a positive policy for behaviour policy that all staff used conscientiously and the pupils responded well to the rewards they received. Most pupils behaved well and were polite and thoughtful. They worked reasonably together, taking turns and sharing, although a few pupils had difficulty in controlling their behaviour. The staff take care to support these pupils but the methods of managing their behaviour sometimes disrupted the flow of the lesson. The pupils behaved satisfactorily around school and in the playground. The school has worked hard to improve attendance, which is now sound, although efforts to maintain the level are being hampered by pupils being taken on holiday during term time;
 - the quality of teaching was unsatisfactory overall; it was satisfactory or better in only half of the lessons and good in a quarter. The teaching in the reception class was good and here the pupils made good progress, so that in much of their work they reach the expected standard for their age by the time they enter Year 1. The unsatisfactory teaching was spread throughout Key Stages 1 and 2. The teachers plan their work carefully and most manage the pupils' behaviour soundly. Where the teaching was better, it was lively and enthusiastic, with tasks that were designed well to enable the pupils to learn rapidly. However, much of the teaching was dull and the pace was slow, so that the pupils' attention often waned. The teachers' expectations of the pupils' achievement were misplaced, so that the work was either too difficult or too easy. In a few lessons, the pupils' behaviour was not managed well enough, resulting in disruption;
 - the curriculum is satisfactory overall, although there are still areas in need of improvement. All subjects receive adequate coverage, although much time is devoted to mathematics and English. Systems for the formal assessment and tracking of the pupils' attainment have improved considerably since the inspection in June 2003 and are now satisfactory. However, the use of assessment for planning lessons and setting the level of work for pupils is at an early stage and reflects the teachers' insecure grasp of the levels of the National Curriculum;
 - the leadership and management of the headteacher are sound: she has a satisfactory understanding of the areas where improvement is needed and has a clear vision for the school. She has put in place many structures and procedures that were previously lacking, and has led a drive for improvement. However, leadership and management overall are unsatisfactory because the senior management team and staff are too dependent on the headteacher, who is overburdened. Although the senior managers are enthusiastic and hardworking, they are at an early stage in providing a drive to improve standards and the quality of teaching. Monitoring has been carried out, but some has not been rigorous enough to identify all areas where improvement is necessary. The governors are very supportive of the school, and the chair of governors works closely with the headteacher.
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Key issues

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers, staff and local education authority (LEA) need to:
- raise standards, particularly in English, mathematics and science, at Key Stages 1 and 2;
 - improve the quality of teaching at Key Stages 1 and 2;
 - develop the leadership and management of the school, below the level of headteacher;
 - improve the accuracy and use of teachers' assessments.

Inspection findings

Standards achieved by the pupils

7. The reception pupils' attainment varies but is within the expected range for their age. They play happily alongside each other and relate well to adults. Most pupils copy simple phrases reasonably accurately and some are beginning to write independently. They write with confidence and their letters are generally well formed. They are acquiring a good mathematical vocabulary as a result of the teacher's strong emphasis on the correct use of precise terms. In one lesson about solid shapes, for example, many pupils began to use words like cuboid, faces and corners accurately and to understand the difference between a square and a cuboid. This learning was then effectively reinforced by a range of practical and creative activities.

8. Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 have been broadly similar to the national average in reading, writing and mathematics for some years, although standards in mathematics have been more variable than those in English. Compared to schools with similar levels of free school meals, the results in national tests were well above average. However, this may be misleading, as, although the school has a high proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, the pupils' attainment on entry is better than this suggests and is at an average level for their age. By comparison, standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have been falling since 1999 and, although the results in national tests rose slightly in English and mathematics in 2003, they were still well below the national average. These results suggest that the pupils had made poor progress during Key Stage 2. The results of the most recent tests at Key Stage 1, which have not yet been validated, are significantly lower than they were in 2003, especially in writing. The school's predictions for the results of the Key Stage 2 tests this year, while very ambitious, are still well below the national average.

9. Overall standards in English are below the national average at the end of Key Stage 1 and are low by the end of Key Stage 2. Although most pupils' listening skills are satisfactory, some pupils have not learned to be attentive. Many pupils' speaking skills are underdeveloped. Their vocabulary is limited and this has an adverse effect on their ability to decode unfamiliar or irregular words in their reading, to use a variety of interesting words in their writing, and to articulate their thinking. There is no planned progression in the teaching

of speaking and listening skills although the school is aware of the need to provide more planned opportunities in lessons for pupils to learn these important skills. Some teachers used effective strategies, such as open-ended questions and paired discussion, to give the pupils the chance to rehearse their ideas and thus gain sufficient confidence to contribute to the lesson. In several lessons, for instance in a Year 1 science lesson about naming the main parts of flowering plants, the teachers identified and taught the relevant subject vocabulary and ensured that everyone used it accurately.

10. As a result of an analysis of assessment data, the school has rightly identified the need to give a higher priority to reading and audit its provision and resources. Assessment information shows that standards in reading in Year 2 are below the national average and are particularly low in Year 6. The way in which reading is taught and the quality of guided reading sessions are inconsistent through the school. In some classes reading is taught as part of the literacy hour whereas in others there are regular discrete reading sessions. The classroom book areas and the library are unsatisfactory; they do not encourage pupils to browse or promote a love of reading.

11. Standards in writing at the end of Year 2 are below those expected nationally, even for the more able pupils. The pupils have made slow progress during the year. The quantity and range of writing are very limited and pupils, including the more able pupils, too often complete worksheets with undemanding tasks that do not require independent writing. However, most pupils write and convey meaning in everyday words and phrases. The more able pupils write in simple sentences, most of which are demarcated with capital letters and full stops, but their choice of words is unadventurous. Handwriting is weak and unjoined. The quality of marking is unsatisfactory. Although it is corrective and often encouraging, it does not inform the pupils of what they should do to improve.

12. The attainment in writing of many Year 6 pupils is very low. A scrutiny of work showed a difference in the progress made between the two classes; some pupils have made good gains this year, while others have made few. Most pupils write in sentences which are correctly punctuated but few use punctuation within sentences and organise their work into paragraphs. There are a significant number of grammatical and spelling errors. Few pupils provide detail to add interest, or use varied sentence structures. Handwriting is generally joined, legible and fluent but some pupils still use upper case letters inappropriately at the beginning of a word. At both key stages, pupils have too few opportunities for sustained and extended writing.

13. The picture is similar in mathematics, with standards below the national average at Key Stage 1 and low at Key Stage 2. The proportion of pupils in Year 2 working at the nationally expected standard or above is lower than average. The pupils know how to carry out the basic mathematical processes of addition, subtraction and multiplication and some undertake division. However, for many pupils, their recall of addition facts is not secure and they make frequent mistakes in calculations. When faced with problems, they do not always know which type of calculation to use. The more able in Year 6 are reaching the required standard in mathematics and a few are approaching the higher level, but there is a significant minority who are unlikely to reach the expected level. Their recall of number facts is weak, and they work slowly and not always accurately. They do not have a firm grasp of place value and find it difficult to apply their skills to problems, often because their weak language hampers their understanding. Even when the more able knew the method of computation to

apply problems, they had to work out the answer to the simple multiplication rather than being able to remember it.

14. The teaching of mathematics was rarely effective in supporting the pupils in making rapid progress. The mental mathematics starters to lessons were not often brisk enough to develop their ability to recall number facts instantly, and teachers rarely used the range of resources that would ensure that they had a clear and quick view of the responses of the whole class. The whole-class teaching part of lessons was often lengthy, so that the pupils had little time in which to complete subsequent activities. The final session of the lesson was not always a sharp summary of the learning that had taken place or a preparation for the next stage. The use of paired discussion was not as successful as it was in some English lessons, so that more time was taken in reaching the answer to the question and the pace of the lesson slowed. The books of the more able pupils showed few errors, suggesting that the work was not stretching them, while the lower ability pupils often had work that they found too difficult. Much of the work was untidy and there was an over-use of worksheets, so that the pupils did not have sufficient opportunity to set out their own work.

15. Standards in science are similar to those in English and mathematics. In Year 2, the pupils have been taught the science curriculum at an appropriate level for their age and many show a sound knowledge of the topics they have covered. However, the less able pupils are unable to demonstrate their understanding. Almost all the activities were recorded on worksheets, so that they have not learned to present their findings in their own way. In Year 6, many pupils have adequate scientific knowledge but find it difficult to make connections between concepts or see patterns in findings. At both key stages, the skills of scientific enquiry are well below those expected. While the pupils understand the elements of a fair test and draw simple conclusions from their activities, they have insufficient opportunity to plan their own investigations, to predict outcomes, select their own methods of recording, and explain their findings.

The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

16. The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development are satisfactory and for the pupils in the reception class they are good. The reception pupils were settled, had positive attitudes to their learning and listened attentively to the teacher and each other. They responded well to the teacher's insistence on classroom conventions, such as putting a hand up to answer questions, and they appreciated the need to take turns when talking in a group. At Key Stages 1 and 2 the pupils have sound attitudes and most were eager to learn. They concentrated on their activities, particularly when the lessons were interesting, and often did their best. There are a few pupils who find it difficult to control their behaviour and the staff worked hard to support and involve them, usually successfully. The sound policy for managing behaviour was implemented consistently and often effectively; consequently the pupils behaved well. However, there were a few occasions when the management of behaviour was less successful and the lesson was disrupted. At times, the use of the behaviour management strategies halted the flow of the lesson, slowing progress for the majority. There have been no exclusions in the past year.

17. The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Behaviour around the school and in the playground was satisfactory. The pupils moved around the school reasonably sensibly and quietly, although there were occasions when the noise level rose. The pupils were boisterous in the playground but there was little

evidence of aggressive behaviour. Nevertheless, the playground supervisors were not sufficiently involved with the pupils or aware of all areas of the playground. The provision for the pupils' spiritual development is not as good as that for their moral and social development. While there are assemblies each day, the act of worship observed did not take place in an appropriate atmosphere or use the time well to promote the pupils' sense of values and beliefs. Few of the lessons gave the pupils an opportunity to consider these areas.

18. The school provides soundly for the pupils' personal development. Almost all pupils formed positive relationships with adults and with each other and worked satisfactorily together, and the teachers made opportunities for the pupils to work in pairs and groups. The pupils who were given responsibility around the school and in class did so well, carrying out their duties sensibly.

19. Attendance is satisfactory, as a result of the school's considerable efforts to improve the level, and has reached the national average in the spring term. However, the level for the summer term is likely to be lower, because some pupils are being taken on holiday during school time.

The quality of education

20. The quality of teaching was unsatisfactory overall. Of the 20 lessons, the teaching was satisfactory in only half of lessons and it was good in five, a low proportion.

21. The provision for the pupils in the reception class is good and the teaching is effective. The learning environment was well organised, bright and attractive. The role-play area, a café, was stimulating and promoted language development and imaginative play well. There had been a significant improvement in the classroom accommodation, which was spacious and enabled the adults to oversee all the activities. The play area is not directly accessible from the classroom and this restricts the opportunities for physical development.

22. The teaching at Key Stages 1 and 2 is unsatisfactory and consequently the pupils make variable and, overall inadequate, progress through the school. Planning was consistent and careful in all lessons and there were positive relationships in most classrooms. Management of the lessons was usually at least sound and there was good support for the pupils with personal and social difficulties. When the teaching was stronger, there was a calm working atmosphere in the classroom and the planning was detailed, based on precise assessments of the pupils' attainment. The learning objectives were clear and the activities were well planned to achieve them. Tasks built on the pupils' knowledge and understanding and they were set at different levels according to the pupils' needs. The teachers displayed a lively manner and enthusiasm, with good subject knowledge. Expectations were high and the pace was brisk, with firm but positive control. Questions were used well to challenge and promote thinking. The learning support assistants were used well throughout the lesson to support the teaching. The marking was analytical and told the pupils what they needed to do next.

23. More commonly, the lessons suffered from several weaknesses. Learning objectives were sometimes unclear, as were the activities. In other instances the work was not matched well to the objectives. There was some lack of subject knowledge, on the part of the teacher; for example, there was confusion about the speed of falling objects and the effects of air resistance in science. Many lessons were dull and the pace was slow, with work poorly

matched to the range of age and attainment in the class. In some lessons, the teachers did not have adequate control, and unacceptable behaviour went unchecked. At times, the boys received almost all of the teacher's attention while the girls were overlooked, even when volunteering to respond. Most teachers did not use questioning effectively, to probe understanding or promote thinking.

24. Frequently, the pupils spent too long sitting on the carpet and, in one lesson, a group spent the entire time on the floor. In some instances, the same work was set for those with average attainment and the more able, and in others some of the pupils were ill-prepared for their activity and consequently demanded much of the teacher's time. Where the teachers set distinct levels of work for different abilities, the tasks were not always sufficiently demanding for the more able. Occasionally, there was insufficient to occupy the pupils and therefore they became restless and the lesson was disrupted through difficulties in control. Some classrooms were stimulating places where the pupils' work was celebrated, but in many there was little display of the pupils' own work. However, the corridors were bright and attractive with many interesting displays.

25. The learning support assistants usually worked soundly with the pupils and groups they supported, helping them to make progress. However, their time was not generally used well during the whole-class teaching sessions and the ends of lessons, when they usually sat with little to do. On occasion they were not sufficiently prepared for the lesson, or did not use their initiative to support the teacher's management of behaviour. The time of the support teacher was not always used effectively, so that his role was similar to that of a support assistant.

26. The pupils' learning was satisfactory or better in ten of the 20 lessons. At these times, they were involved and interested by the work, concentrating well throughout the activity. They knew precisely what they had to do and why, and they were eager to contribute to discussion. In those lessons where learning was unsatisfactory, it was because the teaching was dull, confusing or unchallenging, and the pupils were bemused or their attention wandered.

27. The curriculum is satisfactory overall, but there are some areas where improvement is still needed. A senior member of staff has taken responsibility for the development of the curriculum and has begun by taking advice from the LEA, and giving support to staff in adapting their curriculum planning in line with that guidance. In the shorter term, some appropriate adjustments have been made to the timetable, so that there is more variety in the day. The teachers have identified the focus of the additional time being taken for English, so that the use of the time is more evident. However, the balance of the timetables does not yet provide a well-designed daily range of experience. There is no clear rationale for the timings given to each subject and no analysis as to the amount of time necessary for the school to achieve its targets. As a result, some timetables still show a lack of balance in the subjects being taught during a day.

28. The school's procedures for assessing and tracking the pupils' attainment and progress have improved significantly since the inspection in 2003. A considerable amount of data has been collected and used to identify the pupils in need of extra support and to inform pupil groupings. However, there is insufficient distinction drawn between reading and writing, with the result that pupils' progress in these separate strands of English is difficult to interpret. Targets have been set for each pupil and milestones are set for the end of each term.

This information is thoroughly evaluated to identify and support the pupils who do not make the expected progress. The impact of these efforts, however, is restricted because of the unsatisfactory quality of teaching in some classes. Pupils' answers in tests have been analysed and the school has begun to address the evident gaps in the pupils' knowledge and understanding. At both key stages, the teachers' assessments of individual pupils' writing are often over-generous and are not based on a sufficiently wide range of work across different types of writing.

29. Ongoing assessment in reading is currently unsatisfactory and reading records are inadequate. They are not evaluative, do not relate closely enough to the National Curriculum and do not concentrate on the specific areas which would help the pupils move on to the next level of work.

30. The quality of marking varies greatly throughout the school. It is good in one of the Year 6 classes; these pupils receive thorough and developmental feedback about the quality of their work. In most other classes, however, it is unsatisfactory. Many basic mistakes remain uncorrected and, therefore, the pupils often repeat and reinforce their own errors. At both key stages, the pupils do not receive sufficient feedback about the quality of their work and lack the opportunity to reflect on or improve their work.

Leadership and management

31. Overall, leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The headteacher has been in post for just over a year and provides sound leadership and management. She has a clear vision for the school that is shared by staff and governors and is fully committed to raising standards. She has been particularly successful in helping staff and governors accept and understand the many issues facing the school and in creating a strong sense of teamwork and purpose. However, the leadership and management of the school are unsatisfactory overall because they are too dependent on the headteacher. She carries an unduly heavy burden of responsibility, especially for improving the quality of education, and this severely limits the school's capacity to improve further. The deputy headteacher does not provide her with effective support in leading the drive to raise the quality of teaching and learning. The senior management team is enthusiastic and has responded well to the many initiatives. The team is keen to fulfil its responsibilities. It is in the early stages of development and some of its members are comparatively inexperienced. Nonetheless, it is beginning to be more proactive and focused on school improvement.

32. Although the school is becoming more self-critical, monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance are not yet sufficiently rigorous. The headteacher is well aware of what is happening in classrooms and the school as a whole. She has a clear view of what the school needs to do to improve, which is based on a secure knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses, but she is unable, without increased management support, to bring about the necessary improvements in teaching and learning. Although the teachers are informed of the quality of their lessons, clear judgements are not always made and some written comments are over-generous. The co-ordinators are increasingly aware of their accountability for provision, the quality of teaching and learning and standards in their subjects.

33. The school improvement plan for 2003-04 supplemented the action plan. It addressed some of the areas that were identified after the inspection. The school

improvement plan for the next academic year is in draft form and comprises a list of actions for each subject and aspect of the school. Staff, governors and pupils were suitably involved in the process of development. However, the plan does not sufficiently prioritise the need to improve the quality of teaching and learning and thus raise standards in the core subjects and increase the rate of pupils' progress.

34. The chair of governors works closely in partnership with the headteacher. She has a good understanding of the school's strengths and the areas in need of further development. The governors are very supportive of the school and are more involved in its life. They have benefited greatly from their training, for instance on their roles and responsibilities and analysis of data, but this is at an early stage. They are now beginning to act as critical friends by, for example, asking more challenging questions at meetings. They are kept well informed but are also starting to find out for themselves what is happening through visits to the school, including to classrooms, and through reports from the co-ordinators.

Implementation of the action plan

35. As a result of the inspection report of 2003, the school had six key issues to address. The focus of these issues was: the improvement of the quality of teaching; raising standards; improving the balance of the curriculum; developing the use of assessment; improving monitoring and evaluation; and raising attendance. For the first few months, the school had made reasonable progress in putting in place structures and systems to bring about the required developments. However, overall, in spite of the work of the headteacher and the LEA in providing guidance and support, the impact has been limited.

36. There has been considerable monitoring of lessons, and areas for improvement have been followed up. The school and LEA have continued to provide significant support to teachers to improve their practice, particularly to develop their subject knowledge. Co-ordinators have monitored planning in their subjects and the core subject co-ordinators have used test data to identify areas of weakness. The science co-ordinator has begun to provide training for staff in the use and development of science enquiry skills. Additional teacher support has been brought in to support Year 6 and Year 5, in particular to raise the attainment of the more able pupils. However, in spite of the support and training that has been given, the quality of teaching overall has not improved in the year since the inspection.

37. As a consequence of the limited impression that the support and guidance has had on the quality of teaching, the pupils have continued to make insufficient progress. This is particularly the case for the older pupils at Key Stage 2, who had a significant legacy of underachievement to overcome.

38. The progress made in improving the curriculum has been reasonable, although there are still issues to be resolved. Although the advice from the LEA has not supported the school well enough in designing a timetable to meet the school's needs, the curriculum is balanced adequately overall.

39. Considerable work has been done on improving the school's formal assessment and tracking procedures and there is now a sound bank of data on which to base these, and progress in this area has been reasonable. The teachers have received training to improve their subject knowledge, but their knowledge of the levels of the National Curriculum is not yet precise enough and, as a result, much of their ongoing assessment is inaccurate. This

issue is still having an impact on the quality of teaching; progress in this area has been limited.

40. Much monitoring and evaluation have taken place, and the teachers have received feedback from observations of their levels. The issues identified have been followed up and areas for improvement noted. However, the monitoring has been carried out by a different personnel, and the messages the teachers have received have not always been rigorous or consistent. Consequently, the impact has been limited.

41. The school has implemented many appropriate and consistent procedures to improve attendance, and as a consequence, the level has risen significantly over the past year. The attendance for the spring term was similar to the national average. Good progress has been made in addressing this issue.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in June 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school. Standards were too low; improvements were needed in the quality of teaching; the curriculum was not sufficiently balanced; assessment procedures were unsatisfactory; monitoring and evaluation was not rigorous enough; and attendance rates were well below average.

The school was visited by an Additional Inspector in March 2004 to assess its progress.

In June 2004, two Additional Inspectors returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Twenty lessons or parts of lessons, one assembly and one registration session were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunchtimes and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior staff, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised.

The inspection assessed the standard of education provided by the school and the further progress it has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of June 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address these key issues.