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28 April 2005

Mr David Day  
Executive Headteacher  
Lower Halstow Primary School  
School Lane  
Lower Halstow  
Sittingbourne  
Kent  
ME9 7ES

Dear Mr Day

### **Implementation of Lower Halstow Primary School's Action Plan**

Following my visit to your school on 20 and 21 April 2005, I write to confirm the findings and to notify you of the outcomes.

As you know, the inspection was part of a policy involving a broader series of visits by HMI and Additional Inspectors to check on the development and improvement of schools which have been designated by their section 10 inspection as having serious weaknesses. You will recall that the focus of the inspection was to assess: the quality of the action plan; the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the school; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan and removing the causes of the serious weaknesses.

During the visit I inspected ten lessons or part lessons; attended a registration period and a class assembly; scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school; and held discussions with you and nominated staff on the areas for improvement identified in the section 10 inspection. I also examined a range of pupils' work and spoke informally with other staff and pupils.

On the basis of the evidence gathered during the visit, I made the following observations to you, the acting headteacher, the chair of governors, and an LEA school improvement officer.

Sadly, towards the end of the spring term, the headteacher died suddenly. The deputy headteacher took over as acting headteacher and arrangements have been made for yourself, as head of a nearby village primary school, to be executive headteacher of Lower Halstow during the summer and autumn terms. Rebuilding work is taking place to provide new classrooms on an adjacent site, and all five classes are being taught during this summer term in temporary mobile classrooms.

It has thus been a time of significant change and disruption for the school, to which staff, pupils and governors have adapted very well.

Standards in the core subjects are now showing improvement after a decline since 2002-03. The pupils' average points scores in the Key Stage 2 tests over the past three years have been below the national median in English, close to the median in science, but well below the median in mathematics. By comparison with similar schools, pupils' performance in 2004 was below average in English and science and well below average in mathematics. The proportions gaining the higher Level 5 were below the national average in English and mathematics and a little above average in science. However, the cohort size is small: about 20 Year 6 pupils take the test each year, so comparisons for a particular year have to be treated with caution.

Standards in lessons and workbooks are improving steadily at both key stages in English, including writing, and also in mathematics, although most pupils' confidence and accuracy in number work and investigations are below the average expected of the age-group, apart from some talented individual pupils.

The quality of teaching is at least sound and often good. It was at least satisfactory in all lessons and good or better in seven out of ten. In two lessons it was very good. The strengths of the teaching are positive relationships and good class management, careful planning, and awareness of the needs of pupils in the mixed-age classes. Good practice, especially at Key Stage 2, would benefit from being followed more widely. In some lessons in mathematics, pupils spent too long completing written exercises without having their understanding checked and extended through discussion and feedback. Even so, there have been clear improvements in the quality and helpfulness of marking, the use of lesson starters for mental mathematics, and the inclusion of more open-ended work including problem-solving and independent writing. In the best lessons there was an appropriate level of challenge: planned objectives made clear what the pupils would learn and achieve as well as the content and activities alone. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to the pupils' learning in all the classes.

The good behaviour, relationships and motivation of the pupils are positive features of the school. The quality of learning in lessons matched closely the quality of teaching. A group of Year 6 girls led a class assembly on the London marathon with panache, within the theme of charity work and enterprise. Further opportunities for pupils to take a lead, and for extracurricular activities, would be of value.

The pupils' rate of attendance was 95 per cent at the time of the inspection in 2004. Figures for last term indicate that it has slipped back a little and this will need to be monitored.

Arrangements that have been made for the leadership and management of the school are working well. The executive headteacher has already identified areas

for support and development, such as broadening the curriculum for Foundation Stage pupils, by calling on the expertise of staff at his own school. The acting headteacher will have non-teaching time made available for the second half of this term. There is a clear and shared perception of the actions still needed to raise standards and address the school's serious weaknesses. Building work in progress is being overseen effectively with the help of the governors.

Leadership of the core subjects is capable and enthusiastic, even though two of the co-ordinators have only recently taken on this responsibility. Curriculum management overall, including standardisation of planning, class timetables, assessment, and tracking the pupils' progress, is at an early stage but with clear outlines and objectives emerging. The school's action plan is good: it is thorough in addressing all the areas of weakness, with appropriate timescales and success criteria. It clearly sets out what needs to be done, involving the governors and LEA in monitoring and evaluation. The governing body has devised the present management arrangements and is working closely with the executive and acting headteachers as well as with the LEA. It provides good support.

The LEA has provided a good range of well-focused support during the last two terms. Training has been received for management and subject leadership, for example in mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). The impact of this support is beginning to be seen in improved co-ordination between teachers and raised standards of pupils' work. The LEA's commentary on the action plan and its statement of action are satisfactory. They set out the school's context and arrangements for support but do not explore in any detail the causes of the serious weaknesses which are now being remedied.

## **Action taken to address the improvements needed**

### **1. Raise standards in mathematics and writing**

Regular assessment tests and analysis of the gaps in pupils' learning are helping to focus the teaching on areas of weakness, especially at the upper end of Key Stage 2. There is now a greater awareness of the need to consolidate skills and encourage mathematical thinking. Marking and assessment are improving although the causes of errors and misconceptions are not always investigated sufficiently by teachers. Literacy was the initial area of focus and the positive impact on standards has been greater here than on mathematics so far; for example in developing pupils' skills and interest in writing, and in checking their own work. Writing of good quality, showing improvement over time, is being achieved in each class.

Progress on this area is good.

## **2. Improve provision for ICT so that pupils achieve as well as they should**

A new computer suite has been set up and is housed temporarily in a room off the sports hall until classrooms now being built are completed. Laptop computers are available in each class. A scheme of work has been produced and an audit of teachers' skills undertaken. Each class has time reserved for ICT on the timetable. A lesson seen was well managed by support assistants and allowed pupils to practise number-sorting at their own pace. Provision has been recently much improved and there are suitable plans for the future, although the use of computers by pupils to enhance learning in subjects remains limited.

Progress on this area is reasonable.

## **3. Improve systems for monitoring and evaluating to ensure that weaknesses are identified and tackled rigorously**

Analysis of data on pupils' progress has helped to identify and remedy underachievement. Teachers have received training in how to assess and evaluate samples of pupils' work: this has given the pupils a clearer idea of what they need to do to improve. The acting headteacher has assessed work in different subjects as part of a project in her headship training, thus assisting class teachers to co-ordinate their efforts. Subject leaders have not yet had non-teaching time to observe lessons in their subject across the school, although there are plans to bring this about. They have received support from LEA advisers. Staff are aware of the need for monitoring and how its outcomes can be used to raise standards.

Progress on this area is good.

## **4. Ensure that the race equality policy is monitored and outcomes reported to parents; ensure that the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has sufficient time to carry out her role**

The SENCO is at present on maternity leave and her class teaching has been taken over by a supply teacher. There are suitable arrangements for the executive headteacher with the help of the SENCO from his own school to fulfil this role in the interim.

Progress on this area was not evaluated during this visit.

Good progress has been made in implementing the action plan and removing the causes of the school's serious weaknesses.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, and the Strategic Director of Education and Libraries for Kent.

Yours sincerely

**MICHAEL WEBB**  
**Additional Inspector**

cc: chair of governors  
LEA