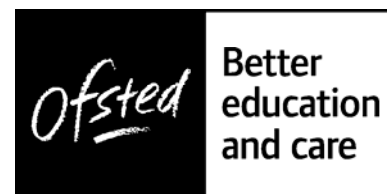


Preston Support Centre
Ringway House
Ringway
Preston
Lancashire
PR1 3HQ

Direct Tel 0800 389 5686
Direct Fax 01772 565353/565299

www.ofsted.gov.uk



24 May 2005

Mr J Anderson
Headteacher
Northfield Junior School
Falcon Road
Dronfield
Sheffield
S18 2ED

Dear Mr Anderson

Implementation of Northfield Junior School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 16 and 17 May 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 two registration periods and an assembly; scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school; and held discussions with you, nominated staff, the chair of governors and the link adviser from the LEA 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 chair of governors and the link adviser from the LEA.

Evidence from teachers' assessment and the school's analysis of recent test results indicates that standards are rising. Although the results of national tests are not yet available, the school predicts that its results for 2005 will be significantly higher than those of the past three years. The school's own data shows a marked increase in the proportion of Year 6 pupils achieving the expected level in English,

mathematics and science and a significant increase in the number reaching the higher level, particularly in English and science. Inspection evidence, including observations of lessons, indicates that standards are rising across a range of subjects. This reflects a considerable improvement in the quality of teaching and in procedures for assessing and tracking the pupils' progress.

Across the school, standards in lessons and books are broadly average in the core subjects and within each year group the work of a significant minority of pupils shows that they are working above the levels expected for their ages. Pupils of all ages and abilities are making at least the expected rates of progress, with a reasonable proportion achieving well. The pupils' skills in speaking and listening are at least satisfactory and many demonstrated an ability to articulate their thoughts clearly and to contribute to debate and discussions. Reading skills are developing well and by the end of Year 6 most pupils read with fluency and a degree of expression; many read extensively for pleasure.

Writing skills throughout the school show improvement and standards are in line with those expected for the pupils' ages. By the end of the Key Stage, pupils write for a range of purposes and in forms which include stories, poems, letters and reports. Many write at length, in an interesting way and with secure spelling and punctuation. The work of the higher attainers includes examples of well structured narrative in which they use a range of vocabulary to interest and engage the reader.

In mathematics, the pupils are becoming increasingly confident in the rapid recall of basic number facts and in solving mental mathematical problems. Year 5 pupils, for example, were able to order sets of four- and five-digit numbers correctly and most were able to identify lines of symmetry in regular polygons. Year 6 pupils were able to order four-digit decimal numbers and to read and interpret data from graphs and pie charts.

Standards in science are satisfactory and the pupils' work shows that they have increased opportunities for experimental and investigative work. Year 3 pupils, for example, were able to plan a fair test, as they sought to establish which materials they might use to make a den suitable for very young children.

The rate of attendance is in line with the national average, and pupils enjoy coming to school. They behaved well around the school and their relationships with adults and with one another were good. A calm, orderly and purposeful atmosphere pervaded lessons and pupils responded well. The behaviour in almost all of the lessons was good. When required to do so, the pupils worked well together and took turns amicably.

The quality of teaching and learning was good overall. It was satisfactory or better in all the lessons and good or better in seven, including two in which it was very good. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection and is close to the target set in the action plan. At the time of the last inspection, several weaknesses

in the teaching were identified, most of which have been addressed satisfactorily. Teachers have responded well to the training and support provided by the LEA. Nevertheless, in two of the satisfactory lessons there was a tendency for the teacher's exposition to be over long, not leaving sufficient time for pupils to complete the planned activities. In all three of these satisfactory lessons, the teachers missed opportunities to inject a sense of fun and, for the higher attainers especially, of challenge.

When the teaching was very good, there was a brisk pace and high expectations were demonstrated by the use of challenging tasks. The pupils were prepared well for their work, with clear explanations. Activities were interesting and were differentiated at suitable levels for the range of attainment in the class. In the good lessons the activities were open-ended, enabling the pupils to learn well at their own levels. The teachers used questions well to promote thinking, draw out and check understanding, and develop concepts. Resources to support learning, including interactive whiteboards, were used to good effect. In all lessons, the teaching assistants were well informed and used effectively to support the lower attaining pupils. In most lessons, the teachers gave the pupils appropriate opportunities to speak, sometimes at length, and when the teaching was most effective, the pupils were asked to explain how they were going to approach their work, or the strategies they had used. There were many examples of paired discussion to enable the pupils to develop their thoughts and this was often accomplished well.

Curricular planning has improved. A curriculum map has been drawn up, which gives an overview of what is to be taught in each year group, and planning for the foundation subjects is guided by commercial schemes of works. Good use is being made of the national strategies to promote pupils' skills in literacy, oracy and numeracy. Planning for pupils with special educational needs continues to be good. Procedures for assessing the pupils' attainment and tracking their progress across the school have improved. Teachers have a better understanding of the levels at which their pupils are working and a greater focus is given to meeting the needs of the higher attainers. A regular cycle of assessment activities takes place through the academic year. As a result, the school has accumulated a significant amount of information about the pupils' performance, particularly in English and mathematics. The process of target setting has begun but it is at an early phase of development, except in mathematics where pupils have been set individual targets based on teacher assessment. Marking is inconsistent and this area of the school's work needs further improvement. Although there is now an adequate assessment system in place, the school is still at an early stage in exploiting the use of data.

Following the inspection in November 2004, the headteacher, with support from staff, governors and the LEA, drew up an action plan to show how the school would address the areas of weakness identified in the inspection report. The action plan is sound with some weaknesses. Actions to tackle each issue are recorded systematically and appropriate timescales and success criteria, including quantifiable indicators, are included so that progress can be measured. A number

of key personnel with responsibility for actions are identified, as are the arrangements for monitoring and evaluation. However, the links between monitoring actions and evaluating their impact are not robust enough. To make the document a better management tool, clearer identification of the leaders of actions, the use of interim milestones for actions and greater detail about the evaluation process would be helpful.

After the inspection report of November 2004 the LEA acted promptly to support the school in drawing up its action plan. The statement of action is good; it is well structured and contains details of the wide range of support that the headteacher, staff and governors will receive to implement the action plan and remove the causes of the school's serious weaknesses. Effective procedures for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the support are included in the plan, and the allocated funding is clearly identified.

In addition to the curriculum support and training provided for staff, senior advisers have provided an appropriate programme of training for governors, who are now more actively involved in monitoring the school's work and in holding it to account. The additional finance allocated for resources includes funding for the services of an advanced skills teacher, who works in the school for one day per week. The link adviser has provided an effective programme of support and training for the headteacher, including paired lesson observation and work scrutiny. However, this aspect of the school's work is underdeveloped. The headteacher is the only member of staff with leadership and management experience as there is no other senior manager in the school. Although the curriculum leaders are better informed about their roles and responsibilities and plans are in place to develop their monitoring skills, they do not yet have the expertise or experience necessary to enable them to lead and monitor work in their subjects. Weaknesses in the management structure have delayed developments in some areas, and if not addressed are likely to limit the school's capacity to improve in the longer term. The LEA is committed to supporting the school until the causes of serious weaknesses are removed; it is important, however, that the school demonstrates the ability to function effectively without the level of support currently provided by the LEA.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: improve important aspects of teaching including the pace, challenge and match of work in lessons in order to raise achievement, especially for more able pupils

The quality of teaching has been evaluated above. Reasonable progress has been made on this area for improvement.

2: improve the leadership and management, through more focused strategic planning and evaluation, to ensure that subjects are taught more regularly and to sufficient depth.

Steps have been taken to improve curricular planning and timetables indicate that all subjects of the National Curriculum are taught regularly. The action plan has given the school a clear focus for improvement in the short term and has brought about necessary improvements in some areas. However the school does not have a longer term strategic plan. Monitoring and evaluation to inform future planning are at an early stage of development. Nevertheless, since the inspection reasonable progress has been made in this area for improvement.

3: make more rigorous and consistent evaluation of the school's performance in order to raise standards.

Better assessment procedures and use of test data have given the staff a clearer picture of the levels at which their pupils are working and this has helped them to plan more effectively for differing needs, particularly those of the higher attainers. The programme of lesson observations has led to significant improvements in the quality of teaching. Reasonable progress has been made on this area for improvement.

4: ensure that statutory requirements for design and technology are met.

Planning for the subject has improved and additional resources have been purchased, resulting in better provision for the subject. Reasonable progress has been made on this area for improvement.

Reasonable 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 Chief Education Officer for Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely

SHEILA BOYLE
Additional Inspector

cc: chair of governors
LEA