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Mrs A Jarvis
Headteacher
Linden Primary School
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Dear Mrs Jarvis

Implementation of Linden Primary School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 16 and 17 June 2005 with my colleague Mrs Jan Jones, Additional Inspector, 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 we inspected 14 lessons or part lessons; attended four registration periods and two assemblies; 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. We 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, we made the following observations to you, the deputy headteacher, the chair of governors and a representative of the LEA.

Standards in English are rising throughout the school, especially in writing, but remain below age-related expectations. Results of the 2005 Key Stage 1 national tests show that standards in reading and writing are in line with those of similar schools in 2004. This represents a significant improvement on the performance in previous years and a sharp rise since 2004. The school predicts that results in the 2005 Key Stage 2 national tests will be significantly higher than those in 2004,

especially in writing. Although it anticipates improvements in reading, they are not as marked as in writing.

Oral skills are variable and, although many pupils are sufficiently confident to answer the teachers' questions, some are reluctant to participate in discussions with each other. In many lessons, the teachers provided good opportunities for the development of speaking and listening skills through strategies, such as response partners, with whom the pupils rehearse their ideas. Talk for learning has been appropriately identified as a focus for improvement next year.

The improvements in planning for literacy, monitoring of teaching and learning and the use of assessment have had a very positive impact on pupils' achievement. The teachers' planning is consistent and has a suitable focus on the development of basic skills. Pupils' attainment and progress are carefully tracked and all assessment information is thoroughly analysed and discussed with class teachers to identify underachievers, inform pupils' groupings and determine future action, such as intervention strategies.

Provision for reading has improved although standards remain too low. New resources have been purchased, parents are becoming increasingly involved in supporting their children's learning at home and guided reading sessions are becoming more effective, although practice through the school is still variable. Reading records are inadequate. Teachers' comments rarely evaluate what the pupils can do and what they need to do next and do not relate sufficiently closely to National Curriculum levels. Older and more able pupils are not given sufficient guidance when choosing books to ensure that the texts are appropriately challenging.

Standards in mathematics have risen, although they remain below average in both key stages. This rise in standards, coupled with improvements in mathematics teaching, reflect sustained and concerted action by the school. The removal of setting throughout Years 3 to 6 has helped teachers to raise their expectations of all pupils, and all the teachers are now contributing to the development of teaching and improvement of standards throughout the school. Training has been targeted at the fundamental subject knowledge of teachers, and there have been cross-school initiatives in problem solving and mental maths. Pupils' books are now marked well in almost all classes. Planning for the next academic year is well in train, with teachers who will be teaching particular year groups working together with the LEA numeracy consultant for several sessions. A new published scheme that the school considers is more appropriate to its stage of development in mathematics teaching has been purchased. Following temporary arrangements for the co-ordination of mathematics for some months, a teacher has been identified for this role from September.

Standards in science have also risen. Additional time was given to science in Year 6 during the latter half of the school year, and the QCA schemes of work have been introduced throughout the school. The new science coordinator has audited

the learning resources, and has visited another school to observe science being taught effectively. Working with the deputy headteacher, she checks the class timetables and teachers' medium planning to ensure coverage. Science has been addressed at staff meetings, and there are plans to introduce a new scheme of work, and to find 'smarter' ways of planning the curriculum.

The school has improved its systems for tracking pupils' progress, and setting targets.

The teaching was satisfactory or better in 12 of the 14 lessons observed, and good in five lessons. This supports the school's assertion that the quality of teaching has risen in several classrooms since the LEA carried out a review of the school in May. Pupils' progress in all lessons mirrored the quality of the teaching.

The school has worked very hard at improving the quality of teaching and learning, with the support of the LEA. Teachers' expectations of the pupils are generally appropriate, with few examples of teachers seeking to justify teaching that was undemanding in terms of pupils' capabilities or background. Teachers are enthusiastic, and their relationships with pupils are generally good. Lessons are planned to promote learning, are purposeful and focused, and include a variety of activities that engage pupils. There were examples of information and communication technology in general, and interactive whiteboards in particular, being used to motivate pupils, and drive forward their learning.

The weaknesses in some lessons included lack of differentiation, lack of focus on pupils producing work of high quality, plenaries that were over-directed and that did not move beyond 'show and tell', some residual weaknesses in teachers' subject knowledge, insufficient development of pupils' vocabulary, and residual weaknesses in the environment for learning.

The school has worked very hard to improve the curriculum and address the issues reported at the time of the inspection. The planned curriculum is broad but not yet balanced. The overview of planning and curriculum map show clearly what should be covered when. However, teachers are not given sufficient guidance about how much time should be spent on each unit of work and what is planned is not always translated into practice. An analysis of the timetables shows a number of anomalies in the amount of time spent on science, religious education and the foundation subjects and an over-emphasis on literacy, particularly in Year 1. In many classes, there is little daily variation in the shape of the school day. At present, cross-curricular links are incidental rather than planned, and are too dependent on the expertise of individual teachers. Planning for the development of skills is being addressed but is in the early stages of development.

The behaviour of the pupils is good, and a strength of the school. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory or better in all lessons, and good in half of the lessons. Occasionally the behaviour of small groups at lunchtime becomes

boisterous. Pupils are loyal to the school, and appreciative of improvements made in recent months. Attendance has fallen slightly over the last year.

The school is led very effectively by the headteacher, working in partnership with the deputy headteacher. Key roles, including the leadership of literacy and numeracy, have been covered effectively when postholders have left the school. The school has a full complement of postholders for next year, and has taken the opportunity to reconsider its management structure. The morale of teachers is good. The governance of the school has continued to develop.

While the school's original initial action plan was appropriate, its relevance diminished following developments in the school including substantial changes in staffing, and following a review that the LEA carried out in May 2005. The school's revised action plan is clear and succinct and sets out what needs to be done and who will lead each development. Its organisation shows a clear sense of priority and urgency, and reflects the common sense of purpose and high expectations with which this school plans to secure its improvement. The approaches to evaluating progress are rigorous.

The LEA's commentary is thorough, and its statement of action is good. The commentary outlines the support the school has received, and will receive, and reflects its close work alongside the school. The statement of action is integrated with the school's action plan, and commits the LEA to extensive and coherent support for the school.

A LEA Review of the school in May 2005 judged it to have made unsatisfactory progress overall since its inspection. The LEA has subsequently increased its support to the school, which has helped it to secure its improvement.

Action taken to address the key issues

1: raise standards in English, mathematics and science

Progress has been good in writing, and has been reasonable in English overall, mathematics and science.

Progress is reasonable.

2: improve the quality of teaching and learning

The teaching in the school is now sound overall. Progress in improving the quality of teaching is reasonable.

3: restructure the curriculum to ensure that subjects are taught more frequently

The planning of the whole curriculum has been improved substantially, although the curriculum that is taught continues to lack balance in some classes. The school now meets statutory requirements by providing parents with information about its performance in national tests.

Progress in this key issue is good.

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 Director of Children's Services for Gloucestershire.

Yours sincerely

DR JANET MILLS
Additional Inspector

cc: chair of governors
LEA