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8 June 2005

Mrs J Powell  
Headteacher  
Long Mead Community Primary School  
Waveney Road  
Tonbridge  
Kent  
TN10 3JW

Dear Mrs Powell

### **Implementation of Long Mead Community Primary School's Action Plan**

Following my visit to your school on 18 and 19 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 11 part lessons; attended two registration periods and one assembly; scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school; and held discussions with you, the chair of governors, a representative from the LEA, the educational psychologist, the welfare officer and nominated staff and consultants 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, the newly appointed deputy headteacher who is joining the school in September, the school council and other pupils.

On the basis of the evidence gathered during the visit, I made the following observations to you, the chair of governors and two representatives from the LEA.

The school has suffered from considerable instability in staffing over the last two years and currently five out of the nine classes are taught by temporary teachers. The school does not have subject leaders for literacy and numeracy and support for these subjects has been ably provided by a non-teaching seconded member of staff

and by a LEA subject specialist. A full complement of permanent teaching staff is expected to be in place for September 2005 including new subject leaders for literacy and numeracy.

The pupils' attainment is too low. The school's results in the national tests in Key Stage 2 have fallen over the last two years although there was a slight improvement in mathematics in 2004. The results in Key Stage 1 also rose slightly in 2004 but have remained significantly below average over the last four years.

Standards in lessons were generally below that expected for pupils of their age although pupils in the Foundation Stage were working securely within an acceptable range of achievement in several of the Early Learning Goals.

There was a concerning lack of achievement in literacy. For example, several pupils in Year 2 were unable to read simple words such as 'train' and spell words such as 'ship'. A significant number of pupils in Year 1 were unable to even begin to read the simplest reading books and several pupils in Year 6 found it difficult to find rhyming words.

Standards in mathematics were more secure although the work was pitched at the lower range of expectations for pupils of their age. The pupils in Year 3 were asked to complete relatively simple mental calculations although a few more difficult questions were included at the end. The pupils in Year 6 were set an appropriate task but there was no impetus for pupils to achieve at a higher level. Interestingly, pupils were more engaged and confident when responding to spatial questions. Pupils in Year 2 very quickly understood the concept of symmetry and started to push their learning forward. Pupils in Year 5 responded immediately to how many sections there would be if a piece of paper was folded three times but found following spoken instructions much more difficult.

In the science lesson observed, the task was too complex for many of the pupils to access without excessive support from the teacher and the teaching assistants.

While there is more use of information and communication technology (ICT) the work is generally of insufficient depth. The one exception was a Year 4 lesson where pupils used ICT effectively to increase their knowledge of China.

The overall quality of teaching and learning has not improved although the teaching in the Foundation Stage has remained good. The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in seven lessons, including three in which it was good and one in which it was very good. In three lessons the quality of teaching was better than the learning. While effective teaching strategies were used and appropriate tasks given, the pace and amount of learning were inhibited by low levels of prior achievement. In one of these lessons the teacher had only just joined the school and was working impressively to establish a positive working relationship and set higher expectations for work and behaviour.

In the lessons where teaching and learning were unsatisfactory there was insufficient clarity of learning objectives, a lack of recognition of pupils' different learning needs and inconsistent management of the pupils' behaviour.

In the most effective lessons, the teachers have established clear codes of behaviour and an environment of mutual respect. The pupils in one class were welcomed warmly at the start of the day and concerns about PE kit were dealt with sensitively. Teachers set work that built on and extended previous learning. Pupils in another class were constantly challenged by being asked 'so what are you going to do now?'

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were better in the more effective lessons. They were more committed and quicker to settle. There was more enjoyment and sense of achievement. They were also more open to questions and keen to discuss their work. In contrast, where agreed codes of behaviour and positive working relationships had not been established, pupils quickly lost patience and concentration. While pupils' attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory or better in seven lessons, positive engagement in the learning was seen in too few lessons.

There has been a marked improvement in the behaviour of pupils in and around school. There is an impressive nucleus of pupils deeply committed to the school who act in a very mature and responsible manner. The behaviour of all pupils during playtime is less boisterous than at the time of the section 10 inspection, and the school is aiming to improve this further through the purchase of more facilities and changes to the layout of the playground.

The headteacher joined the school in September and has had to deal with ongoing staffing issues. Her strong leadership has contributed significantly to the appointment of the new senior and middle management team which joins the school in September. She is also working hard to increase the input of the pupils in the ongoing development of the school. Her self-evaluation provided, in the main, a fair description of the school and she has a clear picture of the strengths of the school and the areas that require further improvement.

Effective procedures have been put into place in respect to attendance and pupil welfare and the external support for literacy and numeracy has been well integrated into the work of the school. Resources for reading have been greatly increased and the school environment has been improved significantly. Every classroom now provides a stimulating learning context that is helping to increase pupils' respect for, and pride in, the school. There is greater sense of shared responsibility amongst the staff. One of the school secretaries provides excellent support through playing the piano in assemblies.

The governors are much more directly involved in the school and have clearly defined areas of responsibility. The new chair of governors is committed to the improvement of the school and is fully aware of the need to maintain vigilant monitoring of the action plan to ensure continued progress.

The plan is satisfactory overall with some good aspects. It identifies a good selection of appropriate tasks and presents clear lines of accountability. The timeline provides a very helpful overview. The questions used to monitor the impact of the actions are particularly effective and will help to secure improvement. However, some of the success criteria do not provide enough challenge and there is insufficient information about how the intended outcomes will be achieved. For example, it is not clear how the teachers' expertise will be increased and what is meant by 'extend the use of practical approach to 80 per cent of lessons'.

The LEA has provided very good support to the school and is committed to its ongoing development. The LEA's commentary and statement of action are satisfactory overall with some weaknesses. The commentary on the action plan provides a sound overview and correctly identifies the need for further support from consultants for literacy, numeracy, science, assessment and ICT. However, insufficient emphasis is given to supporting subjects in the statement of action.

Nevertheless, good support has been provided by the literacy and numeracy specialists who have diligently improved learning resources, provided clear assessment data and identified pupils at risk. The school has also benefited from good support from the educational psychologist and welfare officer.

### **Action taken to address the key issues**

#### **Key Issue 1: to improve achievement in English, mathematics and ICT**

While some progress has been made in mathematics and ICT, achievement in English remains an issue of concern as standards are still too low. Progress on this key issue is limited.

#### **Key Issue 2: to continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning**

The quality of teaching has not improved and significant areas of weakness remain. Progress on this key issue is limited.

#### **Key Issue 3: to improve assessment to ensure that work builds on children's prior attainment**

Good work has taken place to develop sound methods of assessment and provide information about pupils' prior attainment. However, this data has yet to be used effectively. Progress on this key issue is reasonable.

#### **Key Issue 4: to improve levels of attendance and punctuality**

Attendance and punctuality have improved considerably. Progress on this key issue is good.

## **Key Issue 5: to increase leadership and management effectiveness**

Strong leadership has been provided by the headteacher, and the governing body is now fully involved in the improvement of the school. However, leadership at middle management level has had to be provided from outside of the school. Progress on this key issue is limited.

Overall, reasonable progress has been made in implementing the action plan and removing the causes of the school's serious weaknesses. Staffing matters are largely resolved and the school is poised for greater progress from September.

However, this visit has raised serious concerns about the standard of education provided by the school and I am recommending a return visit.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Strategic Director – Education and Libraries for Kent. This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

**ANTHONY KNIGHT**  
**HM Inspector of Schools**