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Better education and care

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Ms J Braithwaite
Acting Headteacher
Brookfield House School
Alders Avenue
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Dear Ms Braithwaite

Implementation of Brookfield House School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 6 and 7 July 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; 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. The observations took place at the primary and the secondary sites; the Home and Hospital Tuition Service was not inspected during this visit.

On the basis of the evidence gathered during the visit, I made the following observations to you, a representative from the LEA, the chair of the governing body and another governor.

The school has undergone some significant changes since the time of the section 10 inspection. An acting headteacher joined the school in February 2005 to lead the school temporarily. In April 2005, the primary department moved to another

building, some four miles from the main site, to allow for major rebuilding work to take place at the main school. The governing body has appointed a senior deputy headteacher who is due to take up his post in September, when the acting headteacher returns to her substantive post.

In 2004, two of the seven Year 11 pupils gained five or more A*-C grades in the GCSE. All the pupils achieved at least five A*-G grades. In 2005, three of the nine Year 6 pupils were entered for the national Key Stage 2 tests. One pupil gained a Level 3 in English, mathematics and science; one pupil gained a Level 5 in English and in science, and the third pupil gained a Level 4 in English and in science. The other pupils in the year group have been assessed by the staff as achieving between Level P7 and Level 2 in all core subjects. The 2005 Key Stage 1 teacher assessments indicated that one of the four pupils attained at the P Levels in all of the core subjects; one of the pupils attained a Level 1 in all core subjects and the other two pupils attained a combination of Level 1 and P Levels. The attainment of some of the pupils is affected by their complex physical, sensory and medical needs. During the monitoring visit the pupils made good progress in almost half the lessons seen.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in eight of the ten lessons, including five in which it was good. Where the teaching was good, the tasks were well matched to the pupils' individual needs. Suitably high expectations were clearly communicated by the staff. The lessons had a brisk pace but all the pupils were included well and appropriate time was given to those who needed it to be able to communicate their answers. Good use of signing supported the deaf pupils. The staff showed enthusiasm for the lessons, which engendered equal enthusiasm in the pupils. Weaker elements of some of the lessons, particularly those which were unsatisfactory, included unclear or undefined learning objectives, a slow pace linked to expectations which were too low, the pupils being allowed to become unfocused, and unclear explanations which caused confusion. The relationships between the staff and the pupils were positive in all the lessons.

The quality of learning was satisfactory or better in eight of the ten lessons. This was directly related to the quality of the teaching. The pupils were ready to start work quickly and listened well to the staff. Several of the pupils were skilled at using their electronic communication aids and were well motivated to do so. The pupils' pace of work was related closely to the staff's expectations. Where they were expected to work at a good pace, they rose to the challenge; where they were allowed to drift away from the task or to work slowly, then they tended to do so. Many of the older pupils were keen to assert their independence in carrying out the tasks which had been set; others were content to be more passive. Almost all the pupils demonstrated levels of concentration which were appropriate for their ages or for their stages of development.

The development of assessment is embryonic. The acting headteacher has appropriately arranged for the introduction of a suitable data collection system, the first results of which have already been sent to Durham University for analysis. A

reasonable assessment policy has been drafted. However this has not been discussed with the staff and therefore has had minimal impact the school's practice. There are no clear plans to take this important step. Although class and subject teachers collect and record information about the pupils' progress in various ways, the senior team lacks an overview and there is no whole-school system for tracking the progress of each of the pupils. No curriculum-based targets are set for improvement. Many of the individual education plan targets are too imprecise and the long interval between reviews does not help to maintain the currency of the targets.

The teachers' planning lacks consistency overall. This is hampered in the secondary department by the lack of a common lesson planning format. The quality of the planning in the secondary lessons was too variable. In one lesson it was detailed yet lacked a focus on the pupils' individual needs; in another lesson it was very brief. Even when the teaching had a clear direction, learning objectives were not evident in the teachers' planning and learning outcomes were absent. However, in the primary lessons the planning was more consistent and generally of a better quality. Planning was strongest for the shared science week lessons; it was focused and detailed, which helped to ensure that all the staff were clear about the desired outcomes. The primary team has rightly recognised the value of this collaborative approach to planning and teaching; the science week has had a very positive impact on the pupils' learning and has provided valuable professional development for the staff.

The accommodation on the secondary site remains unsatisfactory and some of it is poor. The pupils' learning is sometimes hampered by the cramped space and inappropriate furniture. The staff have worked very hard to turn the temporary primary site into a bright and stimulating environment. Suitable adaptations have been made to make the site physically accessible for the pupils.

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were at least satisfactory in all the lessons, including eight in which they were good or better. The pupils were almost always interested in the lessons. They were co-operative with the staff and with each other. They showed enjoyment in their learning and were proud of their achievements. The primary pupils worked very well together in larger groups than usual in their science week activities, showing great enthusiasm for taking part.

Attendance since September 2004 is 91.1 per cent. There have been no exclusions during this academic year.

The school's action plan is satisfactory overall with some weaknesses. It addresses appropriately the key areas for action. However, the plan lacks a clear emphasis on monitoring and evaluation. Moreover the timescales for the actions are too broad and do not define the deadlines for key actions to be taken. Many of the improvements have taken place regardless of these weaknesses and the school has taken some suitable initial steps to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its actions. However in some areas, for example assessment, there has been a lack of

urgency. The school's self evaluation, which was prepared in advance of this monitoring visit, was well supported by the acting headteacher's evaluative documentation.

The leadership and management of the school have improved. This has been energetically driven by the acting headteacher whose good leadership has injected improved rigour into many aspects of the work of the school. She has provided the school with a clearer direction and has effectively managed it on a day-to day basis. Crucially, the school has begun to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. The senior managers carried out appropriate paired observations of teaching with LEA officers and advisers. However, the acting headteacher accurately judged that the findings of these observations were inconsistent and that some were insufficiently evaluative. She has wisely taken responsibility for observing all the teachers in order to standardise judgements on the quality of teaching and learning. A well-designed lesson observation form sensibly identifies the area for development highlighted in the previous observation of each teacher, which then forms part of the focus for the next observation. The school is well placed to utilise these new systems to ensure that all the senior managers become skilled in evaluating the quality of teaching in order to increase the school's capacity to improve.

The acting headteacher has defined the roles of the subject co-ordinators and this has been an important step. The co-ordinators have an appropriate generic description of their roles and have prepared useful subject action plans. The acting headteacher has taken the prudent step of asking the co-ordinators to provide a written update on their progress against the plans. Some of the secondary and primary co-ordinators have met to discuss their subjects but whole-school subject co-ordination is underdeveloped.

The chair of the governing body is dedicated to his role. The governing body has worked effectively to address the weaknesses identified in the section 10 inspection. A suitable schedule of contact with the Home and Hospital Tuition Service has been implemented. A thorough programme of well-focused visits to all the school sites has begun; the governors sensibly record these visits in an agreed format and feed back their findings at the governing body meetings. The governing body has helpfully been expanded to include two additional LEA appointed governors. A well planned programme of training for the whole governing body and for individual governors has given them a valuable opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding of aspects of their role. A guidance booklet, produced by a member of the governing body, gives governors very good guidance and information about the role.

The chair of the governing body has a good understanding of the need to plan resources carefully for the new school building. The governing body has prudently saved a substantial sum of money from the school's budget to purchase the necessary furniture and equipment; this has been carefully considered in the very thorough premises committee meetings. The LEA has recognised that the school

will need to retain an appropriate amount of money until the relevant time in order to make the much needed purchases.

The LEA's statement of action is satisfactory overall with some weaknesses. It provides a suitably detailed account of the ways in which the LEA will support the school and how it will monitor and evaluate its own actions. However, it does not identify the weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation and in timings which are present in the school's plan. Nevertheless, the LEA is providing a wide range of suitable support for the school. The school effectiveness adviser has a good understanding of the school's needs and of remaining areas of weakness. The school particularly values the responsiveness of her support with any difficulties which arise. She has given appropriate consideration to the important need to meet frequently with the new senior deputy headteacher in September. She has efficiently co-ordinated the range of other support from the LEA. The input from the peripatetic teacher for the deaf has been valuable. The LEA is effectively supporting the school to improve its provision for the pupils who are learning English as an additional language. A number of consultants have worked with the school and have begun to have an impact on aspects of curricular planning. The LEA has also provided useful support for governors.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: Improve the leadership and management of the school to ensure that standards of achievement and teaching are consistently high for all pupils

Leadership and management have improved overall. Greater rigour has been injected into several key areas of the school. Some improved systems and structures have been introduced and have begun to have an impact.

Progress is reasonable.

2: Improve the curriculum, particularly for all pupils of primary school age

Progress was not evaluated during this visit.

3. Provide specialist advice and support for those teachers working in the Brookfield House Annex

All the primary pupils are based on the same site. The former Annex pupils, who have severe hearing impairment, are taught in small classes on the site. However, there are planned opportunities for them to work with the other pupils of primary age. This has decreased the isolation of the staff, as well as of the pupils. All the school's staff have been attending British Sign Language training since September. Although the confidence of the staff in using sign language varies, several were

observed signing effectively to the pupils, and seeking advice about subject-specific vocabulary from a fluent teaching assistant. Importantly, the school has appointed a specialist teacher of the deaf who will join the school in September. The school's plans to include all of the former Annex pupils in the main primary classes, with small group teaching at times, are good.

Progress is good.

4. Develop whole school systems for the assessment of pupils' progress and ensure that these are monitored effectively

This area of the school's work remains underdeveloped. The pupils' progress is not rigorously assessed and there are no established systems for tracking progress.

Progress is limited.

5. Improve the role of governors so that they have a better understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses

This issue has been evaluated above.

Progress is good.

6. Meet statutory requirements by ensuring that all pupils in Year 10 have the opportunity to study ICT; ensuring that those pupils based at the Brookfield House Annex receive sex and relationship education

The pupils in Year 10 receive their statutory entitlement to information and communication technology. Some work has begun on sex and relationships education. The school is well placed to continue to develop the teachers' confidence and competence in delivering this aspect of the curriculum.

Progress is reasonable.

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, the Director of School Support Services for Education and the Executive Director for Lifelong Learning for Waltham Forest. This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

SUSAN MORRIS-KING
HM Inspector of Schools