



23 June 2005

Mrs J Grime
Headteacher
St Cuthbert's CE Primary School
St Alban's Road
Darwen
Lancashire
BB3 0HY

Dear Mrs Grime

Implementation of St Cuthbert's CE Primary School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 15 and 16 June 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 where the section 10 inspection indicated that the school was underachieving. You will recall that the aims of the visit were to assess the progress made in addressing and eliminating underachievement and meeting the targets given in the action plan. I also evaluated standards of achievement and the quality of education, especially in relation to areas of underachievement.

During the visit I inspected seven lessons or part lessons; attended a registration period; scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school; and held discussions with yourself and nominated staff on the causes and areas of underachievement. I also examined a range of the 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 deputy-headteacher and representatives from the LEA.

The school has a sound action plan which is in need of some updating. It has a helpful format that addresses all the key issues and identifies the actions to be taken and how the success of these actions will be assessed. Provision is also made for dates for the implementation of the action, and identifies the people responsible; the resources needed and separate arrangements for monitoring and evaluation. The content of the action plan has served the school reasonably well in the first stage of its improvement, where broad issues in teaching and learning were being addressed, but it is too general to take the school forward briskly from

this point. The pace of improvement is slowing in some key areas, notably the work with the more able pupils, despite the hard work and clear commitment of staff. The action plan is becoming less effective in focusing the efforts of all those involved with current priorities. There is an absence of precise numerical targets for improvements in pupils' standards and progress; dates for monitoring and evaluation are often too general; there is limited reference to the contribution of class teachers and support staff, and a lack of clarity about the extent to which the actions being undertaken are successfully addressing each area for improvement.

The school's national test results are influenced by the number of pupils from the school's unit for pupils with special educational needs, especially in Year 6 where results tend to vary significantly from year to year. In 2004 there was a larger than usual proportion of pupils with special educational needs in the year group, with significantly fewer in the current Year 6. Overall, the results are very variable over time.

The results in 2004 for seven year olds were about average compared with schools nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. Compared with schools with a similar entitlement to free school meals, results were above average in reading and writing and well above in mathematics. This was a significant improvement on the previous year's results, especially in mathematics. In science, teachers' assessment indicated almost all pupils attained at least the expected Level 2 for their age, with a higher than average proportion attaining the higher Level 3. Although the trend of the school's results at Year 2 remains below the national trend, the decline of the previous year was no longer evident in 2004. However, the school's predicted results for 2005 national tests suggest this improvement in the trend is unlikely to be maintained, particularly as attainment at Level 3 is expected to be substantially lower than in 2004.

The results in 2004 for eleven year olds attaining at least the expected Level 4 for their age in English, mathematics and science were well below those of schools nationally. This was the same as the previous year. Compared with schools with similar entitlement to free school meals, the results were well below in English, and science, and below in mathematics. This was a decline in English and science with mathematics being the same as in 2003. The percentage of pupils attaining the higher Level 5 was below schools nationally in English and mathematics and well below in science, which was a decline in English and science. Compared with similar schools, Level 5 results in English and mathematics were about average but below in science, which was a decline in science and English. Overall, the trend of results for Year 6 was below the national trend. Although an analysis of results without the pupils from the special educational needs unit provided a more positive picture, there remained underachievement particularly in English and for the more able pupils. Predicted test results for 2005 are substantially better in all subjects, especially in mathematics and science. On the evidence of the school's assessment data, the results are likely to be close to average and better than similar schools.

The school has analysed the national and other test results and is gaining experience of how to use this information to influence the pupils' work. For example, an analysis of the pupils' success in each of the test questions has revealed common strengths and weaknesses in Years 3 to 5, which has enabled teachers to adjust the teaching and learning provision accordingly. Test results have also been used effectively to identify pupils for "booster" groups in literacy and mathematics. However, these developments are at a basic stage which is not yet systematically linked to the planning of teaching and learning in lessons or a whole school approach to planning and checking pupils' progress through school. The overall provision for the more able pupils remains inadequate, although most individual teachers are aware of their needs and there are occasional examples of good work at the appropriate level. Nonetheless, the recent introduction of a new system for tracking pupils' attainment and the increased amount of assessment data now held, provide a good basis for brisker progress towards better achievement by all pupils in the near future.

Standards in lessons vary widely, but the majority of the pupils attain close to the expectation for their age group. The school's records show individual pupils occasionally making better than average progress. For example, the "booster" provision in both English and mathematics has been effective for most of the pupils in these small groups. However, the pupils' progress overall is not yet planned with sufficient rigour to ensure that assessment information and the teachers' knowledge of their pupils combines to ensure a brisk pace. There remains a significant element of underachievement in lessons, especially amongst the more able pupils whose teaching and learning is rarely planned effectively. The pupils who have special educational needs in mainstream classes make at least steady progress, often with the help of teaching assistants. The work of pupils registered with the special educational needs unit was not inspected on this occasion, but their records indicate good or better progress.

The pupils' behaviour is good, as is their attendance. They are willing learners and, with the exception of a very small minority, are consistently co-operative, polite and caring of each other. Most respond well to correction and guidance. Although they have little involvement in improving their own learning at present, the indications are that they respond well when given responsibility. As a result, they are patient and generally diligent even when work is not well matched to their needs. When the tasks are challenging, these personal skills help them to make good progress. Relationships with adults are supportive and encourage pupils to make efforts to succeed.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall although it varies from good to unsatisfactory. This variability is a factor in underachievement. The school's assessment information is beginning to identify the year groups and subjects where the pupils' progress is too slow. The sequence of teaching points in lessons is usually well planned and resources used effectively to maintain the pupils' interest in most lessons. Behaviour management is good. In the good lessons, teachers were particularly skilful in ensuring teaching and activities were well matched to the

pupils' levels of attainment and this ensured at least steady progress, often with good use of teaching assistants to support the least competent. However, lessons are too often planned for a whole class with some adaptation of the tasks for groups of pupils, but rarely enough difference to ensure all are working at a suitably challenging level. It was rare to find teaching planned specifically for a small group of pupils in a lesson. The pupils have recently begun to work in new books so there was limited evidence to judge individual progress over time, but there are already indications of unfinished work or slow development, particularly in writing. Where teachers are clear about what different groups of pupils are expected to learn, the pace of their progress is usually good. Current work in Year 6 shows evidence of accelerated progress in writing, and in Year 1 many of the most competent pupils have a good grasp of the aspects of mathematics they have been taught. Overall, assessment information is not yet linked securely enough to the planning of teaching and learning to ensure the pupils achieve consistently well through the school, although there are occasional good examples.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory, and the leadership of the headteacher is sound. Much useful work has been undertaken, particularly in improving the professional skills of teachers and introducing new systems, notably those related to assessing pupils' standards and progress. The role of the deputy-headteacher has been used particularly well to ensure the curriculum and assessment receive due attention. The pace of development has been well judged in terms of staff development, and the staff team are clearly committed to improvement.

However, in the fifteen months since the last inspection, the broad range of improvement the school has addressed has not focused sufficiently on the specific improvements identified in the inspection report, in order to ensure that pupils' underachievement is reduced as quickly as possible. This is particularly evident in raising the achievement of the more able pupils, which is at a very early stage with too much reliance on individual teachers to ensure improvements take place. However, many of the general improvements the school has made put it in a position to give more urgent attention to these priority areas by using the improved skills and systems now in school to directly influence the pupils' achievement. The training already undertaken by the co-ordinators has improved their awareness of their general role, and they are now well placed to have a more active role in reducing underachievement in their areas of responsibility.

The governing body has several new members and is taking an increased interest in the school. Governors are effectively organised and are developing their knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. In many areas they are in a position to provide useful comment on the issues on the governing body agenda, but need more precise information about the progress made by pupils at different ages and stages in the school.

The quality of the help given by the LEA has been good, despite a delayed start, and has provided the expertise to ensure staff have developed their skills further.

Support and guidance have been provided appropriately for teachers, subject leaders and those involved in management, including governors. The commitment to continue the support is clearly made, with recognition that the school will eventually need to be self-sustaining. The school is likely to need the continuing support of the LEA as it sets priorities for improving pupils' achievement in the near future.

Evaluation of Progress:

The school is making reasonable progress towards raising pupils' attainment and eliminating underachievement.

In relation to the action plan and the impact of the actions taken, reasonable progress has been made in addressing the key tasks which relate to the school's underachievement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of governors, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning for Blackburn with Darwen and the Director of Education for the Blackburn Diocesan Board of Education. This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Jackie M Barnes
Additional Inspector

cc: chair of governors
LEA
diocese