



5 July 2005

Mrs C Caldock
Headteacher
Chipping Ongar Primary School
Greensted
Ongar
Essex
CM5 9LA

Dear Mrs Caldock

Implementation of Chipping Ongar Primary School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 20 and 21 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 nine 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 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 chair of governors and a representative of the LEA.

The action plan is sound overall. All the areas needing to be improved are included and appropriate actions are detailed, many of which are practical and specific. The best success criteria are sharply focused and measurable. The monitoring and evaluation of actions lacks specific timescales. The school's analysis of the 2004 national test results was sound overall. Results for each core subject were analysed in satisfactory depth, with appropriate targets being set.

The results of end-of-key stage 2004 national tests for seven-year-olds in reading and mathematics were well above the national average, and average in writing. This was a good improvement from the previous year. The scores for reading and mathematics were in line with those achieved in similar schools and showed that reasonable progress was being made in reducing underachievement. For eleven-year-olds, results were above average in English, and average in mathematics and science. In comparison with similar schools, the results were below the national average and showed that limited progress had been made from the previous year, with the majority of pupils still underachieving. Indicative results for the 2005 tests at Years 2 and 6 are lower than last year, representing a lower profile of ability of pupils, particularly at Year 6.

In the reception class, pupils' attainment on entry is broadly average. Pupils are making at least satisfactory progress during this year. Good progress was seen in a literacy lesson, where the pupils' knowledge of letter sounds, and of the recognition of these sounds in whole words, was reinforced and then improved well. By Year 2, pupils' work in books and lessons shows that standards achieved in speaking and listening, reading and mathematics are slightly above expectations for their age. Standards in writing and science are broadly in line with age expectations. In Years 1 and 2, most pupils are making sound progress, with some good progress being made so that underachievement is being eliminated at a reasonable rate, most noticeably in reading and mathematics. By Year 6, pupils' work shows that standards are broadly in line with expectations for their age in reading, mathematics and science, and below average in writing. In Years 3 to 6, most pupils are still not making satisfactory progress in all aspects of English, mathematics and science. The situation is little changed since the last inspection. Changes of personnel and discontinuities in teaching have resulted in limited progress being made in addressing underachievement.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in all nine lessons. In one lesson the quality of teaching was very good; it was good in two others. In one lesson which was only just satisfactory, strengths and weaknesses were finely balanced. In the better lessons, for example, in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2, teachers identified a clear learning objective which was shared with the pupils. Tasks were sufficiently challenging to engage the pupils' interest and to bring about good learning. Lessons progressed at a brisk pace and pupils were managed well. Teachers had suitably high expectations for pupils' learning and their behaviour. Teaching assistants were deployed effectively to support the pupils' learning. In lessons that were less well taught, the teachers' expectations for pupils' learning were inconsistent; the quality and use of marking was varied; the amount of time that pupils were active in their learning was too short; and the use of plenaries and learning objectives were not sharply focused. The quality of teaching is not consistently high enough to promote good learning, particularly in Years 3 to 6. Limited progress has been made since the last inspection in ensuring that activities are sufficiently differentiated to meet the differing needs of pupils, based on their prior knowledge and understanding.

The quality of learning mirrored the quality of teaching. Most pupils are making sound progress in lessons, but their rate of progress over time in Years 3 to 6 is not fast enough to eliminate underachievement.

Limited progress has been made since the last inspection in ensuring that teaching is more frequently matched to what pupils' know, understand and can do. The school has sound systems in place for the assessment of pupils' work in English and mathematics. In these subjects, the use of assessment information to guide future teaching is beginning to develop, but is not a consistent feature of teaching across the school. Recent improvements in lesson planning, as a result of monitoring and evaluation by the headteacher, are just beginning to improve this situation. A further positive feature is a growing use by some teachers of the pupils' self-evaluation of their learning in lessons, for example, in Year 5/6 mathematics, and in Year 2 where the information is also used to help plan the next lesson. However, the quality of marking is inconsistent in providing pupils with guidance as to how to improve their work, and in making links to targets set in English and mathematics.

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour were often good and had a positive effect on their work. In nearly all lessons pupils were well-behaved, settled to work quickly, and most were keen to learn, showing good enthusiasm. Their behaviour was also good around school and at break times. School attendance rates are just below the LEA target. The school is correctly beginning to increase its monitoring of the situation so that rapid intervention can take place should rates not improve.

The recently-appointed headteacher has brought a new vitality and clear direction to the school's work. Her leadership and management are good. The use of a consultative approach has resulted in a draft school improvement plan (SIP) being developed to increase the tempo of the school's work in tackling underachievement. It builds soundly on the post-Ofsted action plan. The headteacher's vision for improvement is shared with, and increasingly supported by, staff and governors. Staffing is being stabilised, after a period of instability that has slowed the impact of the actions taken to reduce underachievement. Roles and responsibilities have been amended and clarified, and after a sound reappraisal of staff strengths, agreed changes are in place for subject leadership in the next academic year. Staff comment positively about the better whole-school cohesion and greater teamwork that is developing.

The work of subject leaders has started to be included in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, through making lesson observation and scrutinising pupils' work and teachers' planning. The implementation of a regular and rigorous monitoring and evaluation programme is not yet complete, but a sound start has been made in the eight weeks of the headteacher's appointment. However, the impact of subject leaders' work is limited in bringing about improvement in pupils' learning. Despite the current enthusiasm and commitment of staff, the school's capacity to improve remains fragile.

Governors remain supportive of the school. A useful meeting between some governors and teachers has helped to clarify the governors' responsibilities and intentions in monitoring and evaluating the schools' work. The nomination of governors to oversee key parts of the draft SIP and to liaise with year groups is a good development. Governors and staff have made reasonable progress in addressing the provision of swimming and outdoor activities in the curriculum.

The quality of the school's self-evaluation is improving slowly through such activities as the analysis of test results. The school's intention to put a greater focus on the use of assessment information to improve the pupils' learning is a sound strategy, and based on a self-analysis of the current situation.

The help given by the LEA has been sound. A useful review in February 2005 focused clearly on issues that needed to be addressed and indicated that much of the work of LEA staff had not been implemented rigorously enough by the school. Despite the better direction to the school's work that has been brought about by the new headteacher, the school will need further support to improve the rate of progress being made in eliminating underachievement.

Evaluation of Progress:

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

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

This visit has raised some concerns about the standard of education provided and the school's performance will be monitored.

I am copying this letter to the chair of governors and the Head of Schools Service for Essex. This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Graham Haynes
Additional Inspector

cc chair of governors
LEA