



8 July 2005

Mr A Macey  
Headteacher  
Bethersden School  
Bethersden  
Ashford  
Kent  
TN26 3AH

Dear Mr Macey

### **Implementation of Bethersden School's Action Plan**

Following my visit to your school on 5 and 6 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 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 ten part lessons; attended 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 samples 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, the LEA link adviser and the area education officer.

Most of the Year 6 pupils were away on an induction visit to the secondary school to which they will transfer: the group remaining were being taught by their normal class teacher.

The school's action plan is sound. It addresses all the areas identified as needing improvement and is succinct and manageable. Lead persons and costs are indicated; there is a timeline and success criteria, but there are few links with specific performance targets against which progress will be judged. The

headteacher is given a major role in evaluation, with little planned involvement of the governors and LEA in evaluating the pupils' standards of achievement. There is also an LEA support plan and an action plan as part of the Primary Leadership Programme, which is focused particularly on improving assessment and marking. These are relevant and helpful in assisting the school's improvement.

National test results in 2005 improved significantly in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2, and also in science at the higher Level 5. The results in English were close to those of the previous year. The trend over recent years has been below the national trend and also below the results of similar schools.

At the end of Key Stage 1 in 2005, the results declined on 2004 in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2004, they were close to or above the national median for the age group, but were lower than the results of similar schools in reading and mathematics. More consistent improvement in standards is needed across both key stages.

The headteacher and the core subject co-ordinators have evaluated these results and useful analysis has been made of gaps in the pupils' learning, for example in mathematics. There is a shared determination to raise standards and improve the progress of potentially higher-attaining pupils. With this in mind, challenging targets were set for the English and mathematics tests in Year 6, but the targets were not met. The extent of underachievement by the pupils has been reduced but it is still evident, especially in Years 3 to 5. The headteacher's evaluation of the school's progress is thorough and accurate. He rightly stresses the need for teachers to tackle more effectively identified weaknesses in pupils' skills and understanding, especially in basic literacy and numeracy at Key Stage 2.

Standards of pupils' work were satisfactory or better in the two infant classes but too variable in the three junior classes. The pupils in Years 3 to 5, including the more able, were often not secure in simple calculation, estimating, checking, and in spelling and written expression. They are given more opportunities than before to tackle problem-solving and investigation in mathematics and to write independently and at greater length in English. However, their lack of confidence in doing so results in part from insufficient reinforcement of the basic skills needed to complete the tasks successfully and to improve their work over time.

Evidence in the pupils' workbooks shows some catching up in Year 6 but too little re-drafting of their writing in order to improve its accuracy and presentation. Marking of work sometimes indicates next steps and areas for improvement. The levels achieved are not regularly shown and some comments are too general, such as "a good story" or "watch your spelling". These were also among the weaknesses pointed out 18 months previously in the section 10 inspection report.

The pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning have improved. They were satisfactory or better in all the lessons and good in eight. Enjoyment and a sense of pride in their work were more marked in the infant classes than in Years 3 to 5,

where the pupils were more passive and there was less discussion and interaction with the teacher. The schools' attendance rate is satisfactory: it remains a little below the national average for primary schools.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in all the lessons including five where it was good or very good. It was better in the infant classes than in Years 3 to 5, where strengths were balanced by weaknesses. As at the last inspection, relationships are good and the pupils are encouraged to listen attentively. Lessons are carefully planned and try to provide more challenge than before: however, the use of assessment information and the match of tasks to pupils' abilities need further improvement at Key Stage 2. The pupils did not always understand the aim or purpose of the task. The quality of learning and the progress made were satisfactory or better in eight lessons and good in four, all at reception and Key Stage 1. Where the pace of learning was slow, it was because the teacher's introduction was too long and classroom assistants had little to do except observe.

The headteacher provides good leadership. He and the governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Much work has been done to monitor the teaching and to train teachers in how to improve their practice and raise standards. It is recognized that the impact of this has been uneven and needs to increase. The former deputy headteacher left in the summer of 2004 and a new deputy was appointed from January 2005. Her work and that of the mathematics co-ordinator has raised teachers' awareness and their expectations of the pupils, but this has been slow to translate into consistent improvement of standards. The accommodation and resources have been enhanced with an attractive library, a computer suite and outdoor play facilities, which are beginning to have a beneficial effect, although the quality of displays in classrooms varies from good to below average.

The help given by the LEA through its primary improvement programmes, links with partner schools, visits by subject advisers and by a consultant headteacher, has been well focused and co-ordinated. It has had some impact on improving assessment and tracking the pupils' progress, but the teaching at Key stage 2 has been slower to improve and is still uneven. At the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, progress has been good.

Overall, 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.

In order to raise standards further, the school should aim to:

- identify and share the strengths of the teaching in the infant classes for the benefit of pupils in Years 3 to 5;
- find ways of teaching and reinforcing basic numeracy and literacy skills at Key Stage 2, according to the pupils' individual needs and stages;
- set short-term targets for standards and teaching where these are required, and ensure they are met;
- focus leadership and management on improving standards more consistently, especially at Key Stage 2.

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

Yours sincerely

**MICHAEL WEBB**  
**Additional Inspector**

cc: chair of governors  
LEA