



23 June 2005

Mrs Linscott
Headteacher
Meon Junior School
Shelford Road
Southsea
Portsmouth
PO4 8NT

Dear Mrs Linscott

Implementation of Meon Junior School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 14 and 15 June 2005, with my colleague Mr Graham Haynes, Additional Inspector, we 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. We also evaluated standards of achievement and the quality of education, especially in relation to areas of underachievement.

During the visit we inspected 24 lessons or part lessons; attended a registration period and two assemblies; 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. We 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, we made the following observations to you, the deputy headteacher, four governors including the chair and vice-chair, and two representatives from the LEA.

The school action plan is good. It focuses on establishing important systems needed to underpin the improvements eliminating underachievement. It includes quantifiable targets for the improvement of teaching and raising attainment. It sets out the success criteria in a clear way and details who is responsible for every evaluation. The core subject leaders, and the leader for gifted and talented pupils, have also produced informative action plans, which support improvement in their areas.

The results from the national tests for 2004 at the end of Key Stage 2 indicated that the school's results, based on average National Curriculum points, were similar to national figures in English and mathematics and above the national figure in science. There is a different picture when the school's results are compared with those schools in its benchmark group. In relation to prior attainment at age seven with pupils in similar schools, the results in English were below average and in mathematics they were low. In science they were average. The value added by the school between Year 2 and Year 6 was well below what is expected. However, the trend in improvement over four years is broadly in line with the national trend.

In English lessons, standards of attainment were usually in line with what is expected for the pupils' ages. When the teaching was good, standards were generally higher, for example, the use of a range of strategies, including discussion, modelling and skilful questioning, enabled the pupils in Year 6 to write in an interesting and exciting way when composing riddles related to a fairground ride. In a Year 3 lesson, the pupils had clear understanding of the use of informal and formal language when writing letters. Most of the pupils in Year 6 write in a joined cursive style and generally the pupils take care when presenting their work. Standards in writing are improving, but although many pupils are working at the expected levels, standards overall remain too low.

The school has focused on improving reading skills and this is beginning to have a positive impact. Many pupils have made good progress with their reading skills; they enjoy reading and talk enthusiastically about books which they have enjoyed. Many pupils read fluently and with feeling. Daily, well-planned guided reading sessions are effective in supporting the learning and teachers keep careful records about progress made. Most teachers use opportunities well, including plenary sessions, to promote speaking and listening skills; many pupils are articulate and confident when giving reasons for their answers.

In mathematics, the standards were generally in line with the levels expected for the pupils' ages. The most able pupils in all year groups achieve standards above expectations for their age. The pupils' progress is satisfactory overall, with some good progress evident, for example, in Years 3 and 6 and by the less able group in Year 5. The pupils are making slower and more varied progress in Year 4.

In Year 6 the pupils' knowledge of number facts in times tables is satisfactory. Their understanding of work on shapes, such as intersecting lines is developing soundly, and is generally secure. Approximately a third of the year group is achieving standards above expectations for their age. The pupils have a good knowledge of the properties of shapes and are making good improvements in their understanding of how to calculate its area and perimeter.

Only one lesson in science was observed during the inspection. Analysis of the work in some of the pupils' books shows that many pupils are working at levels above expectations for their age. The pupils are keen investigators with a good range of scientific vocabulary and knowledge.

The school has made satisfactory progress in continuing to develop its procedures and systems for the assessment of the pupils' work in English and mathematics. The pupils' attainment is well recorded and tracked, with a greater emphasis emerging in identifying what needs to happen next, in order to bring about further improvements and in making formative assessments. Teachers are provided with a great deal of useful information that is used to group pupils within each class and target groups. A better consistency is emerging in the provision of activities that are well matched to the pupils' needs, for example, in reading and writing. This has been helped by the school's stronger focus on the use of assessment information to improve the pupils' learning.

The use of marking is developing soundly, with some good practice being seen in the way that the pupils' work is marked in their books, with questions being posed in order to extend their learning. This quality of marking is becoming more consistent across the school.

The school has introduced several positive initiatives such as early morning groups before school to support the pupils' reading, spelling and numeracy skills, and regular sessions for talented and gifted pupils. 'Catch-up sessions' are in place for those who need them, in addition to effective support for pupils with special educational needs. These are beginning to have a positive impact on raising standards and the pupils' achievement.

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were good overall. They were satisfactory in all lessons, including 18 where they were good, and three where they were very good. Contributory factors include suitably high expectations by most teachers for the pupils' behaviour, the positive attitudes of the pupils to their work, and the effective relationships seen between pupils and teachers in almost all lessons. On the infrequent occasions where less positive attitudes were shown, most teachers managed the pupils satisfactorily, so that the lesson continued without undue interruption.

The pupils' behaviour around the school was good and most pupils were polite and courteous to adults and their peers. The behaviour of pupils in lessons varied but was good overall. The best behaviour was seen in lessons where activities interested the pupils and they were given responsibility for their own learning. The very occasional less satisfactory behaviour was associated with teaching that presented too little challenge and variety of activity. The assemblies made a good overall contribution to the pupils' personal, social and cultural development, through the celebration of their work.

Attendance is similar to the national median and most pupils arrive at school on time. A small minority of pupils display challenging behaviour; there have been nine exclusions during the past year.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in all lessons and in 11 out of 24 it was good. Strengths of the teaching included thorough planning, including a range of tasks to match the different abilities of the pupils, with sufficient challenge for the gifted and talented pupils. Introductions and explanations were thorough and teachers used a range of strategies to interest and motivate the pupils. The teachers ensured that the pupils had enough time to think, discuss with a partner and provide a reasoned answer, which supported the learning well. Teachers had high expectations of what the pupils could achieve. The pace of lessons was brisk but appropriate. Teaching assistants were fully involved in the pupils' learning and had a positive impact on their progress. Cross-curricular links made the learning more interesting and meaningful for the pupils, for example, a fairground topic in Year 6 inspired good quality work. In Year 5, the pupils created holiday brochures linked to their geography work about St Lucia. Useful prompts on display in each classroom provided effective support for pupils in English and mathematics. The pupils made frequent reference to the targets and success criteria on display. There were good examples of plenary sessions, for example, when the pupils debated, discussed and evaluated each other's work. In the best lessons, the teachers developed the pupils' learning from previous lessons. There were some weaknesses in the teaching. Teachers did not always have high enough expectations of what the pupils could achieve. Occasionally time was not used to full effect, as teachers either did not give enough time for consolidation or expected pupils to sit for too long on the carpet. In parts of some lessons, the teaching was too mundane and the pace slowed, consequently the pupils lost interest, although most pupils still behaved well. In a few lessons the sound from other classes was distracting because of the open corridors.

There has been extensive monitoring of teaching with very informative feedback, which has been successful in improving the teaching, including that in English and mathematics. In all lessons, the pupils made at least satisfactory progress. However the proportion of good and very good teaching is not yet high enough to ensure that the rate of progress accelerates and all pupils achieve their full potential.

The headteacher, who is ably supported by the deputy headteacher, provides strong and purposeful leadership, with a clear vision for the future of the school. She has ensured that significant improvements have been put into place, which through rigorous and regular monitoring, are becoming embedded in the day-to-day practice of the school. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have a very thorough understanding of the school's strengths and the areas that require improvement. Effective management systems are beginning to have positive impact on eliminating the causes of underachievement and raising attainment. Senior improvement teams have recently been formed which has resulted in more of a team approach towards accountability for standards and improvement.

The role of the subject leaders in English and mathematics is developing well. Each subject leader is more involved in monitoring standards of teaching and learning through such means as lesson observations, the scrutiny of pupils' work and

teachers' lesson planning and the analysis of assessment data. They are developing a clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses in each subject, and are now in a position to provide feedback to teachers. This has been helped by having clear job descriptions that include general duties and specific accountabilities to guide their work. As the school has developed a comprehensive programme of monitoring and evaluation activities, they have played their part in this programme. The leadership of gifted and talented pupils has also developed well; the pupils are quickly identified and lesson plans checked to ensure that they have enough challenge.

The governing body provides satisfactory leadership and management. A small group of enthusiastic and very committed governors carry a heavy workload. A working group has recently produced a very useful self-analysis document on the role of governors, which has identified the most urgent actions. These include increasing the monitoring role and improving the governors' role of holding the school to account for its actions. It has also identified the need for all governors to be involved in the useful training on offer in order to keep up-to-date with important developments in education.

The LEA has provided good support for the school through extensive training in addition to support with monitoring and school improvement planning. The school has been involved in the LEA intensified support programme with a specific focus on improving teaching and learning, which has had a positive impact on improvement.

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, good 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 and the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning for Portsmouth. This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

ANNE JOHNS
Additional Inspector

cc chair of governors
LEA