

7 July 2005

Mr I Shackleton
Headteacher
Waterhouses CE Primary School
Waterfall Lane
Waterhouses
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST10 3HT

Dear Mr Shackleton

Implementation of Waterhouses CE Primary School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 30 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 six lessons or part lessons; attended a registration period 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 from the LEA. Waterhouses is smaller than most primary schools with pupils aged three to eleven. Currently there are 73 pupils on roll including 31 in the Foundation Stage. Many of the children, who start in the Reception class, transfer to a middle school at the end of Year 4. Following the section 10 inspection of January 2004, the school experienced a long period of instability due to an unusually high incident of staff illness. Almost all of the pupils experienced some disruption to their education including pupils in the Nursery class because of staff changes. The headteacher applied for early retirement after the inspection due to ill health and his request was granted with effect from the end of the autumn term 2004. During the autumn term he was off on sick leave for two prolonged periods. At this time the

LEA seconded in an advisory headteacher on a part-time basis to lead the school. The advisory headteacher then took over the leadership of the school again in the spring term of 2005, prior to the appointment of the new headteacher who took up his post at the start of the summer term 2005.

The school's action plan was not completed until the start of the spring term 2005. The plan drawn up by the advisory headteacher in consultation with staff and governors outlines the actions to be taken in order to tackle the causes of underachievement. Each area for improvement is broken down into specific, appropriate, and manageable actions. Key personnel are identified to manage the improvements, but it is unclear with whom overall responsibility for particular improvements lies. Success criteria are defined in terms of quantitative targets against which improvement required over time can be measured. Too frequently, the persons responsible for ensuring the actions take place are also involved in monitoring. The links between monitoring actions and evaluating their impact are not robust enough and there is an over-reliance on external agencies to evaluate progress and identify the next steps for improvement. The timescales for the completion of some tasks are unrealistic given the fragile nature of the staffing structure. Most of the actions were due to be completed within a year but few were started because key personnel were absent or lacked the expertise and experience necessary to bring about the necessary improvements.

National Curriculum tests have varied from year to year over a four-year period. There were so few pupils in Years 2 and 6 in 2004 that comparisons with national test results give no indication of standards achieved overall. There were 12 pupils registered for the Year 2 tests and two pupils in Year 6 cohort. The tests for Year 2 pupils indicated that standards were lower than the previous year in reading and writing and much lower in mathematics. When compared to similar schools the results of tests taken by the Year 6 pupils were lower in English, much lower in mathematics but very much higher in science than previous years. Based on their prior attainment in Year 2 the pupil's progress was satisfactory in English and mathematics and very good in science. Although national comparative data is not available, the results of the most recent tests indicate that of the 14 pupils in Year 2 who were assessed, 11 achieved the expected level or better in reading, writing and mathematics. Three achieved the higher levels. Of the four who took the tests at the end of Year 6, one achieved the higher level in all three subjects, one achieved the expected level in each of the subjects and the other two failed to reach the expected level in any of the subjects.

Inspection evidence, including lesson observations and a scrutiny of pupils' work, indicates that standards vary from average to well below average across a range of subjects. In lessons, standards were average overall, but samples of the pupils' work indicate that the attainment of a significant number of pupils within each year group is often below or well below the level expected for their age, particularly in writing and in aspects of mathematics. The legacy of underachievement resulting in gaps in the pupils' learning is still apparent in many aspects of their work.

The progress made by the pupils was satisfactory in five lessons, and unsatisfactory in one. In no lesson was the progress good. Although the vast majority of pupils behave well, listen to their teachers and are keen to learn and do well, teachers provided too few opportunities for speaking in pairs and small groups. During some introductory sessions, the pupils demonstrated that they could reflect on their work and think for themselves. However, the pace of working was modest in most lessons. The quality of presentation of written work varied between lessons but was below average overall.

In English, achievement in speaking and listening is better than in writing, which is underdeveloped across the school. The handwriting of the many pupils lacks fluency and consistency in style. Final drafts of written work often show untidy presentation, incorrect spelling and grammatical errors. In the oldest class there are a few examples of extended writing which make use of a broad range of vocabulary to interest and engage the reader. In mathematics, achievement is higher in number than in shape and space because in too many classes these aspects of the subject are not covered in sufficient depth.

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons were either good or very good. Most concentrated well and were attentive, despite having to sit on the carpet at the start of some lessons for lengthy periods. Most concentrated appropriately, even in lessons which lacked inspiration and challenge. Their behaviour around the school and in the playground was also good. Agreed behaviour strategies are applied consistently by teachers throughout the school, and the good relationships between the pupils and staff create a positive ethos for teaching and learning.

The pupils are often taught in classes made up of two or more year groups because of the small numbers. The quality of teaching was satisfactory in five lessons, and unsatisfactory in one. In none of the lessons was the teaching good. A number of the satisfactory lessons had good features including: good relationships between adults and pupils; clear instructions and expositions to the pupils at the starts of lessons; and a clear focus on teaching the vocabulary associated with the topic. In a number of lessons the teachers' planning did not include a sufficiently broad range of teaching strategies and tasks to ensure that pupils of differing ages and abilities were working at a level and pace appropriate to their stage of learning. Most lessons were taught to the whole class, with few opportunities for teaching small groups of similar ability. A number of lessons had overly long introductions which often reduced the time available for written tasks and it was not unusual for work in books to be unfinished. The use of plenary sessions varied and few were used well to clarify misconceptions, develop the pupils' learning and inform future planning. Teaching assistants were not always used to best effect.

In the lesson in which the teaching was unsatisfactory the teacher's explanations were insufficiently clear and the most able pupils were not challenged by the work. It was clear that some were simply consolidating knowledge and skills which they had already acquired by completing simple writing tasks which did not move their learning forward.

Assessment procedures are being developed but are still at an early stage. This affects the accuracy of the teachers' planning to meet the individual needs of pupils, as assessment data is not fully understood and used. Data systems which provide information about progress by individual pupils and by cohorts are being developed by the headteacher. The analysis and evaluation of the data to identify gaps in learning, inform the teachers' planning and set individual learning targets has also just begun. The pupils are not yet aware of the level at which they are currently working nor do they understand what they are expected to achieve in the longer term.

The school's curriculum is based on national requirements, and appropriate guidance has been provided for all subjects. Weekly timetables indicate an imbalance in the curriculum because mornings are set aside for literacy and numeracy and all other subjects are fitted into shorter afternoons. During the inspection the taught time in some lessons was reduced by the inefficient use of time and late starts, particularly the first lesson in the morning and those immediately after breaks.

The new substantive headteacher who took up his post at the beginning of the summer term has made a good start. He has been well received by the staff, has gained their confidence and has lifted their morale. He has brought fresh ideas and energy and a much needed sense of urgency to the process of improving the school. He has a clear appreciation of the school's strengths and weaknesses, reflected in the frank self-evaluation provided before for this visit. A draft school improvement plan which encompasses the areas for improvement from the action plan provides a clear basis for moving the school forward. The challenge is now to ensure that the actions taken have a more significant impact on the standards of education provided by the school.

The subject leaders have received good support from the headteacher and as a result they have a better understanding of their role and responsibilities. The headteacher has prioritised developments in subjects and as a result the co-ordination of literacy is more advanced than mathematics. The literacy co-ordinator is approaching her task with enthusiasm and commitment. However, an immediate and sustained effort will be needed to improve the pupils' attainment in mathematics. Many displayed a lack of understanding and confidence in the areas of problem solving, data handling and shape and space, reflecting weaknesses in the provision they received in the past.

Recent changes of personnel within the governing body have resulted in a number of changes to its committees. The chair of governors recognises that further training is needed before the governors are in a position to effectively monitor the schools work and hold it to account for the standards achieved.

The LEA had been aware of the school's difficulties since the inspection and during this period it has provided a broad range of support for the school including

curriculum support, management support and additional funds to recruit a part-time teacher to cover staff absences. Following the retirement of the headteacher it seconded in an advisory headteacher to lead the school for one term to allow the governors time to recruit a new headteacher. It recognises that the substantive headteacher who is new to headship will need more focused management support if the school is to remove underachievement and its causes within the timescales set.

Evaluation of Progress:

Although some notable improvement has taken place since the appointment of the new headteacher, the school has made only 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, the Director of Education for Staffordshire and the Diocesan Director of Education for Lichfield. This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

SHEILA BOYLE
Additional Inspector

cc: chair of governors
LEA
diocese