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Ms D Robins
Headteacher
Wray Common Primary School
Kendal Close
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Dear Ms Robins

Implementation of Wray Common Primary School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 16 and 17 May 2005, with my colleague Ms A Johns, Additional Inspector, 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. We also evaluated standards of achievement and the quality of education, especially in relation to areas of underachievement.

During the visit we inspected 17 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, the chair of governors, nominated staff and a representative of the LEA 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 chair of governors and a representative of the LEA.

Following the school's inspection in May 2004, there was a delay in the publication of the report which meant that the action plan was not completed until October. The action plan is satisfactory, with some strengths. It sensibly concentrates on establishing the appropriate systems that are needed to underpin improvements in

teaching and learning. However, it does not give enough detail of what will be done to tackle underachievement in mathematics and science, subjects which were highlighted as needing particular attention in the inspection report. There are suitable targets for improvements in the results of national tests, including an increase in the proportion of pupils achieving higher levels at both key stages. However, there are no quantifiable targets for improvements in the quality of teaching.

The results of the national tests for 2004 at both key stages have become available since the school's inspection. They confirm the inspection's findings. The school's results compare favourably with the national figures in both key stages, but there is a different picture when the school's results are compared with those of schools in its benchmark group. At Key Stage 1, the school's overall results were broadly in line with those of similar schools, but at Key Stage 2 they were below the figure for similar schools in mathematics and science. The value added by the school between Year 2 and Year 6 was below or well below what is expected. The pupils in Year 6 had recently completed their national tests; tests and tasks were being completed by the pupils in Year 2. There is as yet no firm evidence that the school's results will improve on those of last year.

Both the school and the LEA have undertaken detailed and helpful analyses of the outcomes of last year's tests, including pinpointing aspects of weakness in mathematics and science after scrutiny of the test papers. Some steps have been taken to address weaker areas in mathematics; for example, the progressive development of calculation skills, but weaknesses in science are not due to be tackled until the autumn term. It is also recognised that writing is an aspect of English that requires attention and that differences in the performance of boys and girls need further investigation. Appropriately, targets for improvement in the school's performance in comparison with others in the LEA have been set.

In lessons, standards of attainment were at least in line with what is expected for the pupils' ages. Where the teaching was good, standards were generally higher; for example, clear instructions and good demonstrations by the teacher enabled pupils in Year 4 to solve mathematical problems involving perimeter, using their knowledge of addition, multiplication and division. Where the teaching was less effective, the pupils were prevented from demonstrating their capability fully.

Many of the pupils were articulate, confident speakers, and good listeners. Some of the younger pupils expressed their opinions clearly and justified them to the class, speaking in full sentences and engaging the listener. Older pupils were able to offer explanations and discussed their reasoning when talking about solving problems. They applied their good general knowledge when considering how to respond to questions. The younger pupils' knowledge of phonics was developing appropriately and they used it to good effect when attempting spellings of unfamiliar words. By Year 2, most of the pupils write in a legible, joined style. They responded well to opportunities to use their imaginations when writing; some wrote effective poems in the haiku style about themselves. By Year 6, many of the

pupils write imaginatively and with some flair and a sense of audience. Punctuation and grammar were usually used correctly, but the standard of their handwriting varied widely.

Many of the pupils were capable mathematicians. They used different strategies confidently to solve problems. Most had a good recall of multiplication tables and associated division facts, and used their knowledge of doubles and multiples to help them arrive swiftly at answers. However, some were too quick to come to conclusions and did not have a secure enough understanding of whether their answer was plausible or not.

No lessons were observed in science during the inspection. Scrutiny of the work in some pupils' books showed that standards of attainment were generally in line with what is expected for the pupils' ages, but there was little evidence of greater challenge for the more able pupils. In some classes there had been insufficient coverage over the course of the year, limited emphasis on practical, investigative work and the pupils had not been given enough scope to devise their own investigations and methods of recording findings and conclusions.

In nearly all of the lessons the pupils' behaviour was good or very good, and it was never less than satisfactory. They were attentive and enthusiastic, clearly enjoying their time at school and keen to learn. The pupils' disposition towards learning had a positive effect on the progress they make. Most teachers used clear and easily understood strategies to maintain good behaviour. In a few lessons, where the teacher's management strategies were not so effective, low level chatter interrupted the flow of the lesson. Relationships in the school were good and there was mutual respect between staff and pupils.

Attendance is close to the national median. The school has adopted a stricter policy regarding authorising absences, which has had a slight negative impact on the attendance figures. There are good procedures to promote regular attendance, to monitor attendance and follow up absences.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in all but one of the lessons. The teaching was good in four lessons and very good in three.

Strengths in the teaching included: good, supportive relationships between the teachers and pupils; clear introductions, explanations and demonstrations; the provision of tasks which engaged the pupils and motivated them; good subject knowledge and appropriately high expectations of what the pupils would learn.

The recent work the school has undertaken to raise the teachers' awareness of different learning styles and the focus on clear objectives and success criteria for individual lessons has had an obvious positive impact. Lessons were carefully planned around a specific learning point and well structured. The pupils were clearly used to reflecting on what they had learned and thinking about what they

needed to do to improve. Giving the pupils' time to think and to talk about their ideas with a partner was also effective in promoting learning.

There were some weaknesses in the teaching, not only in the lesson where teaching was unsatisfactory overall. It was clear that the school's new approaches are not firmly embedded; for example, asking the pupils to think or consider what skills they would need to use was occasionally artificial and therefore had less relevance to them, and resulted in an interrupted flow to the lesson. Cross-curricular links were not always well thought out and the main purpose of the lesson became blurred. The pace of some lessons was not brisk enough, and occasionally the introductory parts of lessons went on for too long, giving the pupils insufficient time to complete their independent work.

The school has developed more effective assessment procedures; for example, the pupils' progress is regularly tracked and the levels they are expected to reach by the end of the year are predicted. However, the levels predicted for the more able pupils do not always include sufficient challenge. The use of assessment information is becoming more firmly embedded in the teachers' day-to-day practice. Consequently, they are more aware of what the pupils need to do to improve and how this can be achieved. Data is analysed appropriately to identify the progress made by boys, girls and pupils who have special educational needs and to allocate additional support where necessary.

Through training and staff meetings where the pupils' work is discussed and moderated, the teachers have become more confident at making accurate judgements about the National Curriculum levels at which the pupils are working. In most lessons, the pupils were encouraged to think about and assess what they had achieved; this had a positive impact on their learning.

The school's policy for marking has been agreed. There were some good examples of marking which helped the pupils to understand what they needed to do to improve, but this was not consistent.

In almost all of the lessons, the pupils made at least satisfactory progress. They made better progress where the teachers had a good knowledge of the subject and appropriately high expectations, when they understood exactly what they were expected to do and the pace of the lesson was suitably brisk. However, the proportion of good and very good teaching is not yet high enough to ensure that the rate of progress accelerates for all pupils and they achieve their full potential.

During this monitoring inspection, the school was involved in a "creativity" week. The planned activities made appropriate links between subjects, and gave a good emphasis to artistic and multi-cultural aspects of the curriculum. The pupils responded with interest and enthusiasm.

The current headteacher took up post at the start of the term after the school was inspected. Since that time, she has acted quickly to establish a sense of direction

and purpose, and to agree a vision for the future. She is a good and effective leader, and has quickly got to grips with what the school needs to do next. She has a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. She is determined but appropriately measured in her approach, and is working to foster the leadership skills of senior and middle managers. The formation of four school improvement teams has given senior and middle managers important aspects of the school's work to lead on; the teams' evaluations of their work are clear and point to the next steps. All staff have embraced the strong drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and much training and development work has been centred on improving the teachers' understanding of the different ways in which children learn and helping them to use this knowledge in their daily work. The impact of this training is evident in the greater clarity with which the objectives for learning are explained in lessons, and the emphasis on helping the children to evaluate their own learning and progress. However, there is little documented evidence of an acceleration in the pupils' progress and the eradication of underachievement.

The quality of subject leadership is variable and the impact of co-ordinators on raising standards in their subjects is not equally evident. Not all of the co-ordinators could talk with confidence about standards and the quality of teaching in their subjects. Sensibly, responsibilities for subject co-ordination are to be reallocated in the new academic year.

The governing body is well led by a strong chairman. The governing body has no vacancies, but there are several new members who will require induction and training so that they are able to play a full part in supporting and checking the school's progress.

The LEA has been aware of the school's difficulties for some time, but the steps taken before the school was inspected last year were not effective enough to bring about the substantial improvements which were needed. Since the school's inspection, support has been measured and effectively co-ordinated. Some useful work has been undertaken, for example, in mathematics where the school's co-ordinator and the LEA's consultant have worked together to identify weaknesses and strategies to address them.

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 and the local education authority.
This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

LINDA McGILL
HM Inspector of Schools

cc chair of governors
LEA