



18 May 2005

Mr A Blakeley
Headteacher
Hopton Primary School
Woodend Road
Lower Hopton
Mirfield
West Yorkshire
WF14 8PR

Dear Mr Blakeley

Implementation of Hopton Primary School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Mrs S Øyen HMI, to your school on 4 May 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings which are recorded in the attached note.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the quality of the action plan; the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the school; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan.

The school's action plan is satisfactory overall with some weaknesses. The weaknesses outlined in the third and fourth paragraphs of the note of the inspection findings should be addressed and amendments prepared by the second monitoring inspection.

The LEA's statement of action is good.

The school has made reasonable progress since being subject to special measures.

The LEA's target date of September 2006 for the removal of special measures is realistic.

The school should not appoint newly qualified teachers until further notice.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, and the Director of Lifelong Learning for Kirklees. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF HOPTON PRIMARY SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

Findings of the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures

During the visit seven parts of lessons were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the chair of governors and two representatives from the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils. Samples of work were examined, in particular from pupils in Year 5 who were out of school during the monitoring visit. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the chair of governors and representatives from the LEA.

Since the inspection in November 2004, there have been several changes in staffing. The headteacher resigned and the governing body appointed an experienced headteacher in January. He had been in post for three weeks when this monitoring visit took place. The deputy headteacher, who had been acting headteacher from February 2004, is not responsible for a class this term. Two permanent teachers returned after periods of leave. A temporary teacher was working with a class of Year 1 pupils.

The headteacher consulted governors, staff, parents, pupils and the LEA in compiling the action plan, which was agreed by the governing body on 20 April. The three areas for improvement identified in the inspection report have been re-formed as four key issues. Each has clear success criteria as well as milestone dates, nominated lead personnel and identified resource needs. The detailed monitoring timetable for each term up to November 2006 is a useful schedule to help the school to track its own progress. Although the questions to guide the evaluation process are a good feature, they are not all linked to the milestones and targets. The targets for the pupils' attainment and the quality of teaching are not challenging enough. Those for attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 are significantly lower than in 2004, especially for attainment at Level 3. The school has not identified a target date for the teaching to be 100 per cent satisfactory. Nor has it included targets to raise the profile of good and very good teaching.

The proposals to raise standards of attainment (Action plan: Key Issue 2) are underdeveloped. Other than through general improvements in the quality of teaching, there is little to indicate the action planned to raise standards especially in spelling, handwriting, speaking and listening and investigative skills in science.

The LEA commentary gives a clear overview of the school's context, the action taken by the LEA since 2003 and the planned close monitoring of the school. The LEA does not intend to close the school. It has not appointed additional governors but, following issues voiced by some parents, has offered the opportunity of being an additional governor to any concerned parent. The LEA's decision to review the school's financial position each term is prudent. Although the commentary does

not explicitly assess the effectiveness of the school's plan of action, the extended content and additions in the LEA's statement of action indicate the identification of some gaps, particularly in relation to raising standards and developing assessment.

The LEA statement of action is thorough and comprehensive. It gives a clear outline of progressive, systematic support and guidance to complement the content of the school's action plan. Two school contact officers will work with the school and be responsible for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the programme. Other key consultants and personnel from the LEA will be involved at different times. The LEA intends to invest considerable professional and financial support.

Standards vary from year group to year group and are not high enough at the end of Key Stage 2. There are considerable gaps in the pupils' skills, which reflect past and present weaknesses in the teaching and curriculum. This is most evident in information and communication technology (ICT) where the pupils have not developed the knowledge and skills appropriate to their age. Year 4 pupils struggled to find the letters they needed on the keyboard. There is little evidence of word processing or of the use of ICT as a learning tool across the curriculum.

In 2004, the school's results in the Key Stage 1 national tests were the best in the last five years. In mathematics, although all of the Year 2 pupils attained Level 2, as expected for their age, 92 per cent attained Level 2B and 58 per cent attained the higher Level 3. The average point score in mathematics placed the school in the top five per cent of all schools and well above the average of similar schools. The pupils also performed strongly in reading, writing and science. This was a good achievement for the school. At Key Stage 2, however, a dip in standards in English and science halted the improvement year on year since 2001. The school matched the average of similar schools in mathematics but was below average in science and well below in English. In all three subjects, but especially in mathematics, the girls outperformed the boys and also did markedly better than girls nationally. The girls' strong performance lifted the overall standard.

In lessons, standards varied. The quality of the pupils' work in their books did not echo that of the work on display. The setting out of work and standard of presentation in books was often unsatisfactory, particularly in mathematics.

Standards in reading are higher than in writing. The pupils in the Foundation Stage get off to a sound start in reading and writing. However, not all the pupils in Years 1 and 2 have made the progress they should, especially in writing independently and using simple sentence punctuation. There is also underachievement at Key Stage 2. The pupils have not been taught well enough how to develop and improve their writing. Although many older pupils had organised their writing well, they often failed to use appropriate punctuation and to spell common words correctly. Not all use fluent, joined handwriting. Weaknesses in the pupils' writing limit the quality of their work in other subjects.

The pupils have a sound knowledge of number and procedures to handle numbers but are less secure in knowing when to use their mathematical knowledge and skills, particularly in solving problems and handling data. The pupils remember key scientific facts well. The science week in the spring term was a vital kick start in the development of investigative work in all year groups. Questions were used well to prompt the pupils to make predictions, carry out simple investigations and use a range of ways to record their findings. In the conclusions to their reports, some younger Key Stage 2 pupils raised sensible points about the fairness of the testing.

The teaching and learning were satisfactory in five of the lessons, good in one and unsatisfactory in one. The teachers were well prepared and knew what they wanted to teach. In a few instances, planning had been amended in the light of the pupils' learning the day before. The classrooms were neat and bright; the teachers had taken time and care to display the pupils' completed work in an attractive way. Relationships were good between the adults and pupils and lessons were orderly.

Despite these good features, the teaching too often lacked liveliness and pace to push on the pupils' learning. The teachers do not expect enough of the pupils, particularly at Key Stage 2. They frequently over controlled the pupils and talked for too long. The same task for all did not ensure that the pupils' individual needs were best met and too few pupils had a chance to offer their ideas, explanations and thinking, most especially in the sessions to review what they had done. Teaching assistants gave valuable support when the pupils were working but were rarely involved in class sessions led by the teacher.

The pupils behaved well. They showed respect for school rules, adults and each other. Their positive attitudes, tolerance and ability to remain focused, were striking. The fidgeting of some was understandable, given the length of time they were expected to sit and listen. When the school asked the pupils about what they wished to see improved, they identified the need for more practical activities and less teacher talk. There is much to be done to develop the pupils' independence as learners, to lessen the reliance on worksheets, to widen the curriculum and to make optimal use of the space, resources and adults available, particularly at Key Stage 2.

The quality of leadership and governance has strengthened. The appointment of the headteacher has renewed the confidence of the governors, staff and parents in the school's leadership. He has worked closely with the deputy headteacher and chair of governors to gain a well-founded overview of the school and to determine how best to tailor the budget and staffing to its needs. The governing body is rightly adopting a more critical role in questioning proposals. The chair of governors, new to the position in the autumn term of 2004, has encouraged governors to draw on personal expertise as committee members and as nominated governors for aspects of the school's work. This places the governing body in a far stronger position to hold the school to account.

The senior management team is back to full strength and the headteacher has quickly established a shared approach to school improvement. There is a positive acceptance of the need for change and the programme of professional development is linked well to the content of the action plan. Areas of responsibility have been re-allocated and several subject leaders have already taken steps to improve the quality of provision. The deputy headteacher has continued to monitor the quality of teaching and learning, and to collate information about the pupils' attainment.

For some time the LEA has been highly involved in supporting the acting headteacher, the newly appointed headteacher, the staff and governors in dealing with issues and concerns within the school and the local community. School improvement officers have led vital training sessions for the staff and governors, provided advice and monitored the quality of teaching. Their detailed reports highlight many of the points in these inspection findings. The governing body now has a clear picture of the school's finances and its role in managing the budget. The headteacher has drawn up plans to ensure the school does not overspend. The LEA's decision to allocate the school a place on the Primary Leadership Programme in the next school year complements the focus in the action plan on developing the quality of leadership in school improvement.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: improve teaching, assessment, pupils' achievement and standards in English, science, ICT and religious education

The school has developed its procedures to track the pupils' progress and to monitor the quality of teaching. The teachers have received feedback on their work and agreed points for improvement. They have worked together to attribute levels of attainment to the pupils' writing and to set up systems to track the development of the pupils' skills in science and ICT. While the action gives a sound foundation for future work, it does not yet show in improvements to the teaching or in standards. The progress in dealing with this area has been reasonable.

2: improve the extent to which teaching and the curriculum meet the needs of pupils of differing abilities and support pupils' attitudes to learning and their spiritual development

This area has been evaluated above. Progress has been limited.

3: improve the leadership and management of the school so that key staff and governors have a better understanding of how to bring about school improvement

This area has been evaluated above. Progress has been reasonable.