



11 July 2005

Mrs A Stewart
Headteacher
Ashingdon Primary School
Fambridge Road
Ashingdon
Rochford
Essex
SS4R 3LN

Dear Mrs Stewart

Implementation of Ashingdon Primary School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Robert Ellis HMI and Sean Harford HMI to your school on 6 and 7 July 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures. The focus of the inspection was to assess: 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 has made reasonable progress since the last monitoring inspection and reasonable progress overall since being subject to special measures.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Head of Schools Service for Essex. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF ASHINGDON PRIMARY SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit 12 lessons or parts of lessons, four registration sessions and one assembly were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the chair of governors, nominated members of staff, and a representative from the local education authority (LEA). Informal discussions were held with other members of staff, parents, and with pupils and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the headteacher, the chair of the governing body, and representatives from the LEA.

Provisional results for the 2005 national tests show that there has been significant improvement in attainment at Key Stage 2 when compared to the results for the previous year. Standards seen in lessons confirm that standards are rising and that most pupils are making at least satisfactory progress towards their targets. However, weaknesses in previous and current provision have resulted in underachievement by a significant minority of mostly younger pupils.

The quality of the pupils' learning, including the progress made, was satisfactory or better in ten lessons and good in five. This correlates closely with the quality of teaching, though where the teaching was very good, the progress made did not match it, mainly because some of the pupils lacked confidence in applying the skills learned and very few asked questions that demonstrated a real desire to learn more. Most of the pupils have developed good work habits; they settled to tasks quickly and were not easily distracted. Generally, the pupils took pride in their work and sought to complete tasks in a reasonable time.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in ten lessons; it was good in four and very good in two. In two lessons, the teaching was unsatisfactory and in four of the lessons judged to be satisfactory overall, the strengths only just outweighed the weaknesses. There was a clear distinction between the generally good quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 compared with that in Key Stage 1, where despite some effective teaching, too much was barely satisfactory.

The school has provided appropriate training for the teachers to improve the use of assessment, including: better use of displays; a renewed focus on learning objectives; encouraging the pupils to talk productively about their ideas; and marking the pupils' work to inform future progress. Generally, these strategies were employed in lessons, though with varying degrees of success and more effectively in Key Stage 2 than with the younger pupils. Most of the displays in classrooms and around the school are well presented and many have a clear focus on learning, but too little reference was made to them during lessons. Learning objectives were mostly clear and precise, and enabled the pupils to judge their progress, but some were too vague and gave little idea of the teachers'

expectations for the lesson. The opportunities given for the pupils to rehearse their ideas through talking with a partner were generally effective; very good use was made of small group discussions in mathematics lessons in Years 5 and 6. However in a small number of lessons, for example in art, the questions used to stimulate the discussions were poorly constructed and only warranted superficial responses. The marking of the pupils' work was regular and up-to-date, but other than in the core subjects, much was limited to corrections or brief comments based upon the pupils' efforts.

The good or better teaching was characterised by: appropriately high expectations for the pupils' work; good pace and a variety of interesting activities; and well planned, effective use of the teaching assistants.

The defining features of the least effective teaching were: a slow pace linked with a lack of timing in the planning; weakly constructed objectives that failed to set an appropriate agenda for learning; and a failure to provide suitable equipment and resources that diminished the pupils' progress.

The headteacher and her senior leadership team continue to provide effective leadership and management. Regular and frequent monitoring of teaching has identified strengths and areas for development. The judgements in relation to the teaching are accurate and the school has a clear picture of the overall quality of teaching. Appropriate professional development opportunities have continued to be provided to address the weaknesses in teaching. The training has had a positive impact on the quality of some teachers' planning and the teachers are starting to use assessment information to provide a better match of tasks to the pupils' needs and prior attainment. However, where teaching was previously unsatisfactory it remains so.

Subject leaders have had an opportunity to increase their knowledge across all key stages and are developing an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning in the areas that they manage. However, in the foundation subjects those developments are at still an early stage.

Staffing structures have been reviewed and revised to provide more balanced teams across the key stages from September 2005. An opportunity is planned for staff, in conjunction with the LEA, to share and review the schools "vision".

Governors are well informed, they monitor the progress that the school is making, and hold the school to account for the standards it achieves.

The pupils' behaviour and attitudes were good overall; they were satisfactory or better in all lessons and good or better in ten. In lessons, most pupils had a positive attitude to their learning and few pupils remained reluctant learners. A small minority of the pupils continued to be over-reliant on prompting from adults and were unwilling to take responsibility for their own learning. Most pupils worked together well in groups and pairs but a few were reluctant to engage in discussion

with a partner and gave little support to other pupils. Many pupils are now more settled in lessons and there was less unnecessary movement in classrooms compared to that seen on previous visits. Relationships were generally good and most teachers fostered an atmosphere of mutual respect in their classrooms.

The LEA has provided a good balance of advice and support and has continued to assist the school in monitoring the implementation of the action plan. Much of the support has focused on addressing issues raised by the monitoring inspection in March 2005 and on improving the quality of teaching.

Action taken to address the key issues

Key Issue 1: improve achievement and raise standards, particularly in mathematics and science

Standards are rising and most pupils in Key Stage 2 are making good progress. However, too few of the younger pupils are achieving the higher levels of attainment and a significant proportion of the pupils continue to underachieve.

Progress is reasonable.

Key Issue 2: improve teaching and learning throughout the school so that standards rise

The proportion of teaching and learning that is at least good has improved since the last monitoring inspection, but too much is still unsatisfactory or just adequate.

Progress is reasonable.

Key Issue 3: develop leadership and management to increase the speed of improvement

Although good progress has been made in addressing some aspects of the issues for improvement there has only been limited success in eradicating unsatisfactory teaching.

Progress is reasonable.

Key Issue 4: improve curricular provision, in particular the termly and weekly planning, and assessment procedures, so that they promote progression in learning from year to year

As reported above, the school has focused on developing a good range of assessment techniques to improve the pupils' learning. The progress so far has been assessed through lesson observations, reviewing the pupils' books and written evaluations by the teachers and pupils, many of whom made positive comments.

The impact on the overall quality of teaching has been reasonable, but best practice has not been embedded across all year groups.

Planning for learning continues to be at least satisfactory in literacy and numeracy, but the level of detail and precision seen in these areas is not matched by all of the teachers in the foundation subjects.

Progress is reasonable.

Key Issue 5: work more closely in partnership with parents to support their children's learning

Parents feel that they are well informed about the progress their children make and that they have good opportunities to meet with teachers to discuss any concerns they might have. Educational visits are well supported by parents. Parents receive regular information about the topics that their children are to study.

A parents' consultation group has been established and parents have been invited to participate in making decisions about changing the staffing structure and the organisation of classes.

Progress is reasonable.

Key Issue 6: improve the provision for children in the reception year to ensure equality of opportunity for all and to meet the requirements of the Foundation Stage curriculum

The classrooms for the youngest pupils offer a stimulating environment for learning; there is a good mixture of useful resources and the pupils' work is celebrated appropriately through display. The outside area is now used more effectively and teaching assistants are employed with small groups to encourage better engagement in learning and greater independence.

Suitable training has been provided for the staff in using information and communication technology to record and report the pupils' assessment information.

Sensible plans have been made for making further improvements from September, including the provision of two single-age classes for the Reception pupils and regular coaching to improve the quality of teaching.

Progress is reasonable.