



11 May 2005

Mrs L Wombwell
Interim Headteacher
Potters Gate CE Primary School
Farnham
Surrey
GU9 7BB

Dear Mrs Wombwell

Implementation of Potters Gate CE Primary School's Action Plan

Following the visit of Ms T Herring HMI and Mr R Kapadia HMI to your school on 25 and 26 April 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 second 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, the Director of Education for Surrey and the Diocese of Guildford. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF POTTERS GATE CE PRIMARY SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN

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

During the visit 17 lessons or parts of lessons, four registration sessions and one assembly were inspected. Meetings were held with the interim headteacher, the chair of governors and a representative of the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff 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 interim headteacher, the headteacher designate, the chair of the governing body and a representative from the LEA.

Several organisational changes have occurred since the previous monitoring visit. The interim headteacher's contract finished at the end of the spring term and the school is now led by its third temporary headteacher in less than one year. The transfer has been well managed. A substantive headteacher has been appointed from September 2005 and the current interim head is liaising closely with her in order to ensure a smooth transition. Two teachers have left the school and because of the low numbers in classes and weak financial position (the roll is 60 pupils below its capacity) the governors have sensibly amalgamated classes. This change in organisation has worried some parents and resulted in the withdrawal of a small number of pupils.

The school predicts that this year's national test results at Key Stage 2 will be closer to national expectations but below those achieved by similar schools. The predictions for the end of Key Stage 1 national tests are worryingly low.

In lessons, standards in English were mixed. They were good in the Foundation Stage where the pupils speak and listen well. Several of the pupils had better literacy skills than are expected for pupils of this age. However, in Year 2, despite good progress recently, more than one third of the class were working at levels which are below what is expected nationally. Nonetheless, the most able attained high standards. They read well and wrote beautifully presented and fluent letters, stories and descriptions. Most of the pupils in Year 6 have made sound progress in English and some have made good progress. Many of the pupils achieved standards in line with national expectations. The pupils accurately assessed their own writing and that of their peers and some recognised how the work could be improved. Standards in mathematics lessons varied from good to unsatisfactory and were just below what is expected, overall. In Key Stage 1, because of the pupils' earlier experiences, standards were relatively higher in Year 1 than in

Year 2. Standards were lower than expected in Year 6 where, despite additional work in areas of weakness, gaps in mental skills held the pupils back.

Records continue to indicate that too many of the pupils in Key Stage 2 make insufficient progress over time and that a significant number make negligible progress. The rate is uneven across classes and between subjects. Progress in lessons was directly related to the quality of teaching, which was uneven and only adequate overall. Teaching was good in seven lessons, satisfactory in eight and unsatisfactory in two. Good teaching was seen in all key stages and unsatisfactory teaching was only seen in Key Stage 2. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching remains too high.

Good teaching was characterised by the teacher's constant focus on the pupils' learning. Their participation and interaction was secured through a range of carefully structured and suitably varied teaching strategies and resources. The match of the tasks to the pupils' ability was sound and the teachers' interventions moved the pupils forward because they were timely; based on assessment within and prior to the lesson. Some of these good lessons could have accelerated learning even more with some better use of time and resources.

As previously, unsatisfactory teaching was characterised by inappropriate expectations, a poor match of task to ability and ineffective teaching strategies, including muddled explanations. Consequently the pupils failed to learn. Some of the satisfactory lessons contained a fine balance of strengths and weaknesses. Some of the teachers, for example, talked for too long; conducting all discussions through themselves via overly long question and answer sessions. As a result they were unable to ensure the pupils' full participation or effectively assess their learning. In some satisfactory lessons a minority of the pupils made insufficient progress because their tasks were insufficiently challenging.

Planning has improved. Objectives were almost always clear and they were introduced well to the pupils and sensibly used to title their work. Although practice is inconsistent, overall the level of challenge in literacy and numeracy lessons has improved and the pupils' tasks are better matched to their differing abilities. The teachers are beginning to use more ambitious and varied teaching strategies. However, some potentially good planning for the foundation subjects was insufficiently structured, the pupils were unclear about what was required and their tasks did not reflect their abilities. Planning for the use of teaching assistants was effective in literacy and numeracy lessons but the staff were often underused in whole class teaching sessions. Displays included some good celebrations of high quality work but the classrooms do not provide consistently good support and stimulus for independent work.

The school is a positive, happy community and relationships between the adults and the pupils are strong. In lessons, the pupils' attitudes and behaviour were always satisfactory and often good. Because of consistently high expectations there has been a significant improvement in the attitudes of the oldest pupils. The rate of attendance, at 94 per cent, is an improvement on last years' figure of 93.5 per cent and is above the target figure of 93.7 per cent. However, attendance remains below the national median and it is of concern that the rate has fallen since the autumn term. A recent section 23 inspection judged provision for social, moral, spiritual and cultural education to be good. Acts of worship were found to enhance the pupils' capacity for experiencing and expressing awe and wonder. Moral development is taught effectively via social interactions with the staff, assemblies and the curriculum and a sound range of cultural and social activity extends the curriculum.

The quality of the leadership and management is satisfactory overall. The interim headteacher has quickly understood the challenges facing the school and made appropriate plans for her brief period of leadership. Understandably, after two weeks in post she was only just becoming familiar with the school's organisation and the repeated changes in leadership have slowed the pace of improvement. Nevertheless, disruption has been minimised, the quality of monitoring is good and weaknesses are properly followed up with support and action. Some subject and aspect co-ordination has improved the management of mathematics, English and assessment and is satisfactory.

Governance is satisfactory. The governors' knowledge and understanding has grown as they have become more involved with the school. The new system of a 'duty governor' has been welcomed by the staff. The chair of governors is effective. He understands the complexities and constraints of the current staffing situation and is rightly keen to achieve stability for the school. The governors successfully appointed the headteacher designate and they have made some difficult decisions to secure the future of the school. They have rectified some weaknesses in the systems of financial accounting but the school requires a greater level of operational support to ensure good financial management.

The quality and impact of the LEA's support are good. Consultants have trained the staff, taught alongside them and conducted joint monitoring and evaluation exercises. LEA officers have given strong support to the interim headteachers and to the governing body. Training for the latter has been well received. The quality of the LEA's monitoring is sound and evaluation provides a clear agenda for future development. The LEA and the diocese provided good support for the appointment of the headteacher designate.

Action taken to address the key issues

Key Issue 1: secure effective leadership and management

The interim headteacher has made a good start. Her experience and insight are assets. She has a clear agenda and the implementation of the action plan continues with little slippage. The plan is routinely evaluated and the process has become an important factor in determining the next stage of development. The requirement to evaluate teaching and learning under Key Issue 3 has been fulfilled and some action plans for individual subjects have been further refined.

Job descriptions have been revised but they have not been shared with staff and performance management has not yet been implemented. The internal capacity for wider leadership has improved but there is much more to be done to improve the roles of co-ordinator and year-group leader. Some of the staff continue to rely very heavily on external support. It is timely that science is set to become a focus for development; there is much to be improved. Governors have been proactive but the review of school policies is behind schedule and, in order to ensure greater efficiency in the conduct of meetings, the relationship between committees warrants clarification.

Progress is reasonable.

Key Issue 2: develop and embed assessment processes

There have been useful developments in a number of key areas. Data on prior attainment at Key Stage 1 has been added to the tracking sheets for English and mathematics. Achievement has been properly reviewed to identify the pupils who make slow progress. Assessment information is helping to inform teaching and learning and the pupils have appropriate targets for the next stage of their development in literacy and numeracy. Most of the pupils know what they need to improve and some have assessed their own progress. Some of the teachers are beginning to identify the criteria by which the pupils' work will be judged and share it with them. This is a good development. A marking policy has been agreed with the staff but an audit shows some inconsistencies in its application. The staff have begun to moderate the pupils' work. Overall, the developments are sound but recent changes have yet to be fully embedded and the presentation of assessment data makes it difficult to access.

Progress is reasonable.

Key Issue 3: to raise achievement of all pupils, and in particular, higher attaining pupils

Achievement is uneven but it is improving along with improvements in the quality of teaching and assessment. The organisation of ability, invention and support groups provides suitable support for the more able pupils, those who are underachieving and the less able. The subject leaders of English and mathematics have a growing understanding of the relationship between achievement and provision and this is evident in their subject action plans. Nevertheless, achievement continues to be hindered by some inappropriate levels of challenge. Additionally, the pupils in parallel classes receive unequal access to the curriculum; lesson time is sometimes eroded; the development of literacy across the curriculum is not systematically planned and the use of information and communication technology to enhance learning is underdeveloped.

Progress is reasonable.

Key Issue 4: to ensure good quality provision in the Foundation Stage

The quality of provision in the reception class continues to improve. The pupils demonstrated sound skills in communication, language and literacy and followed the classroom rules and routines well. The teaching staff worked well together. Their roles were clearly planned and the presence of one adult sitting with the pupils on the carpet helped some of them remain focussed in a whole class session. However, because of an occasionally unhelpful style of interaction by the teacher the pupils' responses were unsatisfactory. Questions were posed to the whole class. The pupils were not encouraged to put up their hands or answer sensibly and the seating arrangements prevented some of the pupils from seeing the board easily. The quality of assessment is satisfactory and comments provide good pointers for the next stage of the pupils' development

The organisation and layout of the classroom has improved considerably. The outdoor area is exciting but small and underused. Appropriately, a significant amount of development work is planned.

Progress is reasonable.