

Suite 22 West Lancashire T 01695 566930
Investment Centre F 01695 729320
Maple View www.ofsted.gov.uk
Skelmersdale Wn8 9tg Ofsted helpline: 08456 404045



2 December 2005

Ms D Bell
The Acting Headteacher
Lawefield Primary School
Lawefield Lane
Wakefield
W Yorkshire
WF2 8ST

Dear Ms Bell

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF LAWEFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL

Following my visit with Ms Joan McKenna, Additional Inspector, to your school on November 9 and 10 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was found to have serious weaknesses in May 2005.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior teachers, the chair of governors and representatives from the local authority (LA).

Context

The headteacher at the time of the May 2005 inspection resigned at the end of the summer term. The deputy headteacher, appointed in April 2005, has become the acting headteacher, and the assistant headteacher has assumed the role of deputy headteacher. As a consequence of these changes, work on producing an action plan to address the areas for improvement did not begin until September, and was completed in mid-October, while action to start the process of improvement only began in September.

Achievement and standards

The 2005 national tests and assessments taken by pupils at the end of Years 2 and 6 were almost immediately after the previous inspection and have not been influenced by any of the measures currently in place to raise standards. Most results were lower than those in 2004 and almost all were considerably below the national figures. Only around half of the Year 2 pupils reached the expected level for their age in reading and writing and even fewer in mathematics. Very few attained above average standards in either subject. At the end of Year 6, while the results in mathematics and science were a little higher than in 2004, they were lower in English, and in all three subjects the results were below the 2005 national figures.

Despite recent actions to improve the quality of pupils' work the impact of earlier weaknesses is still evident and standards seen in the lessons were low. In English, for example, the writing skills of some pupils are not well developed. Work contains basic errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling, and often shows a limited use of vocabulary. On the other hand, there is evidence of a more systematic approach to providing work that is well matched to pupils' needs. Pupils in Year 5, working on improving their writing by adding clauses to make sentences more detailed, were producing work of a good standard. Speaking skills are not strong. Some pupils converse confidently while others, more commonly girls, are hesitant. They can answer specific questions, and some do so with enthusiasm, but are less able to express viewpoints or give explanations for their answers.

Nevertheless, there are signs of improvement. All pupils have been set specific targets to improve sentence structure in their writing. This is sharpening both staff and pupils' awareness of what needs to be done to improve the quality of their work. The new marking policy, although recently adopted and not yet implemented fully and consistently, is nevertheless resulting in some clear feedback to pupils about how well they are doing and what they are to do next. The action plans to raise standards in English, mathematics and science all identify appropriate priorities and activities, although they are at very early stages of implementation.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory progress has been made.

Personal development and well-being

The pupils display positive attitudes to learning. They settle quickly in lessons, have good levels of concentration, and for the most part show interest and enjoy their work despite some occasions when the teachers fail to involve them as fully as they could in the cut and thrust of a lesson. The pupils learn to be independent from an early age, sharing and taking turns, and are respectful of each other, listening to what each has to say, particularly in whole class sessions. They show respect for both adults and other pupils.

Behaviour, both in and out of lessons, is of a high standard. The pupils cope well with the expansive nature of the buildings and move around with ease and common sense.

The pupils make satisfactory progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There are virtually no incidences of bullying or racial disharmony. The elected school council meets fortnightly and has made contributions towards improving the school playground and the constitution of school rules.

Attendance was identified as a key area for improvement. The school is working hard to improve levels and has already attained the target of 93.7 per cent which was set by the LA and the school. Although this is not yet in line with the national average, it is much better than at the time of the inspection. A number of developments have contributed to this improvement including the review of responses to unauthorised absence and moves to heighten the pupils' and parents' awareness of the need to attend regularly. The appointment of a learning mentor, due to take up post later this month, together with LA support, holds out the possibility of tackling issues about extended holiday absence and persistent absenteeism.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- Significantly raise levels of attendance – satisfactory progress has been made.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching was good in six lessons and satisfactory in the remaining nine, although there were weaknesses in two of them. There were no examples of inadequate teaching. The best teaching was characterised by dynamic teacher inputs to stimulate the pupils' interest, well-structured tasks and probing questions which both challenged the pupils to further effort and

enabled the teacher to assess what the pupils had learned. Much of the satisfactory teaching has the potential to be of good quality, although there are some common weaknesses which hold it back. Some teachers over-direct lessons and spend too long on introducing the learning, so that the pupils have little time left to work independently or produce work of sufficient length. Although the content of newly formed lesson plans is appropriate, too many pupils are given the same work to do with some of it proving to be too easy or too hard.

The curriculum is broad and balanced although the teachers have yet to identify how they might use more widely the skills taught in one subject to promote learning in another.

The pupils are encouraged to do their best and they are keen to do so. The staff are also keen to make good the gaps in the pupils' learning which built up over time due to weaknesses in the previous leadership and management. However, the adoption of over-directed teaching styles stifles the opportunities for pupils to play a full part in the lessons.

The school has a clear plan of action to develop effective systems for assessment and tracking of pupils' progress with the sensible intention of providing an 'early warning system' to identify under-performing pupils and provide appropriate intervention. A draft assessment calendar gives details when formal assessments will take place; for example twice yearly assessments based on a common task. The first of these relates to the targets in writing; the outcomes are to be assessed and moderated by all the staff to raise their awareness of the standards being reached, the progress being made, and how to make improvements. This is a positive development. A new marking policy has been agreed and adopted by staff. Although it is in its very early stages and not yet consistently followed, there are encouraging signs that pupils are responding well to the detailed comments on how to improve their work. However its inconsistent implementation highlights the need for rigorous monitoring of new developments. The school is aware that assessment information should be used to help identify the next steps in learning.

Progress on the area for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- Strengthening assessment procedures - satisfactory progress has been made.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the school were judged to be seriously weak at the last inspection. The legacy of long-standing deficiencies is extensive and has resulted in low standards, fitful progress in learning, ineffective assessment and monitoring systems, and teaching which, although committed, had not been supported to enable it to reach its potential. Despite the inspection taking place in mid-May, the former headteacher made very little headway in addressing the areas for improvement. It is only since September that meaningful progress has been made. The acting headteacher has made an energetic and determined start in bringing about improvement. She has gauged correctly the pace of change needed through a number of short and long term measures. Short term measures include additional support for the upper Foundation Stage class; the promotion of consistency in planning procedures; the agreement of how to set targets in literacy and the review of some school policies. Long term initiatives focus on improving pupils' progress in learning, raising standards, and strengthening the quality of teaching. The senior leadership team is being restructured and the roles of subject and aspect coordinators have been identified so that teachers have clear guidance and support.

There have been a number of other developments to resolve issues of attendance, and also to promote partnership with parents, for example, by setting up a 'Positive Parenting' group, and currently, trying to establish a clinic for parents to consult their elected parent governor.

The acting headteacher is displaying good skill in balancing all the various strands of improvement, especially to avoid overloading different groups of personnel; for example the teaching staff, and progress so far has been very encouraging.

The headteacher is receiving good support from the recently appointed chair of the governors. He has a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and is setting about reorganising the governing body structure so as to increase its involvement in the school and its capacity to make informed decisions. The governors are now meeting their statutory obligations regarding the annual report and school prospectus.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in May 2005:

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management - good progress has been made.
- Improve the partnership with parents – satisfactory progress has been made.
- Meet statutory requirements – good progress has been made.

External support

The school has received a very high level of effective support from the LA through its advisers, consultants and other support groups. The school has been very complimentary about the ease of contact and the speed of response. The support, together with the school's determination to succeed, demonstrates a good capacity to sustain improvement.

Main judgement

There are no major concerns about the school's capacity to improve and it has made satisfactory progress on removing the causes of its serious weaknesses.

Priorities for further improvement

- Review the use of time in lessons.
- Continue to improve the differentiation of pupils' work.
- Monitor the effectiveness of assessment procedures and the use of information to plan the next steps in learning.

I am copying this letter to the secretary of state, the chair of governors and the Chief Education Officer for Wakefield.

Yours sincerely
Roger Hartley HMI