



20 March 2006

Mr Sean Smith
Headteacher
Hibaldstow Primary School
Hopfield
Hibaldstow
Brigg
DN20 9PN

Dear Mr Smith,

SERIOUS WEAKNESSES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF HIBALDSTOW PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

Following my visit to your school on 16 March 2006, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, leaders of the core subjects, the deputy chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), and a representative from the local authority (LA).

Context

Since the last monitoring visit in November 2005, where concerns were raised about the stability of the senior management, a substantive headteacher has been appointed and took up post about a month ago. The school's staffing complement has been reduced by one teacher, and the pupils in Year 1 have been split between the reception and Year 2 classes following consultation with parents. There are now 124 pupils on roll, with predictions that the

numbers may fall further next year. The budget for the current year is now unlikely to be overspent.

Achievement and standards

Improvements in pupils' achievement are now evident although there is no further independent statistical evidence available to the school since the 2005 national assessment results, which were well below the national and local figures at both Year 2 and Year 6. Standards remain too low for the majority of pupils, but there are now clear signs of accelerated progress in English and mathematics, both in lessons and pupils' books, which are reflected in the school's assessment and tracking system, especially for the most able pupils. The improvements are mainly linked to changes in the planning of lessons, which now includes clearer identification of tasks and expected learning for at least three different groups of pupils in each class.

In science, improvements in progress are less evident, with many pupils working on the same task with little support for the least competent or challenge for the most capable, who rarely get the opportunity to work independently on investigations. In information and communication technology (ICT), most of the difficulties with the hardware have been resolved in recent weeks and the software range has been increased. Although the timescale is too short to identify improvements in pupils' progress, there is no doubt that the use and enthusiasm for ICT have increased, and there are regular examples in lessons of good use of interactive whiteboards by teachers, and occasionally by pupils. The school is now well set to ensure that the full range of the ICT curriculum is available, so pupils' present good competence in a narrow range of work can be extended.

The school's targets are ambitious for the current year and, on present evidence, may not be met although the decline is likely to be arrested. A strength of the school remains the children's progress in the Foundation Stage, where there is now a range of assessment information which is linked to the planning for their learning. The school's evaluation indicates that most pupils in the current reception year are likely to reach the goals expected for the age group by the end of the year. The improvements in achievement are not yet consistent across all year groups, with the pace of pupils' progress in Year 2 being a little slower than it needs to be if standards are to improve sufficiently. Throughout the school, the tendency to collect data without sufficient analysis or evaluation is still evident, but there are now occasional good examples available. Overall, there is considerable capacity to improve

achievement further as teachers and pupils become more familiar with the better planning for learning and its implementation.

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

- raise standards and achievement further in English, mathematics, science and information communication technology – satisfactory progress

Personal development and well-being

Personal development and well-being continue to be satisfactory, with a welcome increase in the pupils' enjoyment of school. This is partly because many pupils are now recognising their own improvements, and take pleasure in their success. An assembly with certificates and prizes was a good example of how they support each other's achievements, and the smiling faces of the recipients clearly showed their pleasure in their success. Pupils are aware of how to live safe and healthy lives, and develop positive relationships. Meeting their friends remains an important part of their enjoyment of school, as are the positive relationships with adults. Attitudes to learning are mainly good, although on the occasions when the pace of a lesson is slow, restlessness creeps in and attention wanes. In most circumstances, pupils behave well, particularly when they have challenging work, so the tendency to make work easy as a means of keeping pupils involved is no longer necessary. Their growing confidence and independence is too rarely used to get them actively involved in improving their own achievement. Many are now ready for this.

Attendance has continued to improve, and almost all pupils now attend regularly, with good systems for checking absence. The school's statistics are now above average.

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

- improve attendance – good progress. This issue has been resolved.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. However, there are not enough good lessons to ensure that the school's aims for higher standards are achieved. Nonetheless, there are improvements in the overall quality of teaching, particularly the increased focus on matching the teaching and tasks

to pupils' learning needs. With well-targeted support from the LA, the staff have revised their approach to planning lessons to identify clearly what different groups of pupils in a class are expected to achieve. Although there is still some way to go in making sure that this differentiation is also a good match to the needs of the pupils, it is good start which is leading to better progress for many pupils.

The organisation of the learning groups has also changed. This is partly due to having one less teacher in the team which has resulted in splitting a year group and reconsidering the deployment of staff. Good use has been made of this opportunity to be more flexible about the size and composition of the groups in which pupils are taught. For example, the pupils in Year 4 who are normally split between two registration classes, now also have the opportunity to work together as a year group for English and mathematics. This results in Year 3, Year 4 and Year 5 also being taught these subjects as single age groups and in smaller numbers. Combined with the new planning arrangements, this is working well in ensuring increased attention is given to each pupil's work, and most teachers' expectations are beginning to rise, albeit slowly.

Due attention is now being given to assessment and its use to improve achievement. The new headteacher has experience in this aspect of school improvement and is already providing clear leadership in this key area. The systems are new and incomplete, and staff are not yet experienced or accurate in judging the levels pupils attain, or setting suitably ambitious targets. However, the amount of data and information available has increased and is being recorded, so the school is in a much stronger position to decide what pupils need to do next, and to check their progress. Most pupils have weaknesses in their knowledge, skills and understanding, which are often small and mainly a legacy of previous teaching, but which are impeding their progress; notably in spelling, rapid recall of number combinations, and setting up investigations. The school's assessment and target setting systems are not yet addressing these individual weaknesses, although sometimes teachers' marking of work does make clear what these are and occasionally identifies ways to improve.

The curriculum provision is satisfactory overall, and the school is sensibly focusing on making sure that suitable resources are readily available and that pupils make the best of the opportunities that are offered. These developments have been focused mainly on ensuring that the provision in the core subjects of the curriculum is improving but not yet in planning where the pupils can consolidate their learning across other subjects. Pupils continue to be well cared for and supported, with good guidance on personal

development and increasingly accurate assessment information available, but not always used, on how they can improve their work.

The involvement of parents has improved considerably. Several initiatives have been undertaken and well received, including establishing a Friends of the School group, and links with pre-school provision in the locality. The attendance of parents at invited events has been very good and their support has been clearly shown in the significant increase in the pupils' attendance at school. This improved contact and communication has had the benefit of highlighting areas where parents rightly feel there could be improvements, such as in the consistency of homework. The staff are keen to work with parents to improve the school, and value these contacts.

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

- improve the partnership and communication with parents – good progress

Leadership and management

A substantive headteacher has been appointed since the last monitoring visit four months ago and is in post. The change of headship was undertaken smoothly and without losing the momentum of change that had been established by the interim headteacher. The new headteacher already has a clear vision for the school's further improvement, including an early draft of the next school improvement plan, and staff morale is good. The subject leaders have an improved knowledge of the standards and progress of pupils in their areas of responsibility. This information is newly acquired and, although already having an impact on the planning of lessons, its use is not yet as consistent and effective as it needs to be. The school is aware of this and has suitable plans to continue developments.

The IEB is active in the governance of the school, with regular meetings and a full committee structure. Most members do not live in the locality and therefore are not well known to the local community, but commitment to the school is strong. The crucial duty of appointing a new headteacher was discharged with careful consultation, good speed and due attention to means of attracting suitable candidates. Members report that, in the near future, consideration is likely to be given to an outline plan for how governance is to proceed at the end of the IEB's tenure. In common with many schools, numbers of pupils are falling, so there remain challenges ahead in driving standards higher and ensuring that the school effectively recruits pupils.

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

- improve the leadership and management of the school – good progress
- develop the role of coordinators so that they have a secure view of the standards achieved in their subjects – satisfactory progress
- as a matter of urgency, improve accommodation for Year 6 – good progress. This issue has been resolved.

External support

The LA has continued to play a prominent and effective role in the school's progress, including training of staff, financial advice and guidance to senior management and the IEB. With the appointment of a substantive headteacher, the intention is to gradually move the school to an increasingly independent position, while recognising there remains the need for continuing partnership in some areas, notably raising pupils' achievement.

Main Judgements

The school has made satisfactory progress in removing the causes of its serious weaknesses.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to develop assessment systems which enable teachers to plan brisk progress for pupils with different capabilities; to guide children towards achieving this progress, and to check that each is attaining suitably high standards.
- Develop further the roles of staff with responsibilities to increase their impact on the standards and quality of teaching and learning in their subjects.
- Increase the proportion of good lessons.
- Increase the pupils' active involvement in improving their own achievement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of the IEB and the Director of Education for North Lincolnshire LA.

Yours sincerely
Jackie Barnes
Additional Inspector