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Mr K Grayson  
The Acting Headteacher  
Elston Hall Primary School  
Stafford Road  
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Wolverhampton  
West Midlands  
WV10 6NN

Dear Mr Grayson

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF ELSTON HALL PRIMARY SCHOOL

### Introduction

Following my visit with Dorothy Bathgate HMI and Kris Sharma, Additional Inspector, to your school on 21 and 22 March 2007, 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 became subject to special measures in October 2006.

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

### Evidence

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

### Context

The headteacher and chair of governors resigned soon after the inspection in October 2006. The deputy headteacher was in day to day control of the school until Christmas. An acting headteacher from a neighbouring LA was seconded to the school for the first half of the spring term. He was appointed to the substantive post from the beginning of the summer term. In the intervening period he has kept a watching brief over Elston Hall but has not

been able to spend more than part of each week at the school. Three teachers left at Christmas and their posts are being filled by long term supply teachers.

### Achievement and standards

The results of the 2006 assessments at Key Stage 1 were below average. The pupils performed better in mathematics than they did in literacy. In writing, a third of the pupils failed to reach the minimum expected standard (Level 2c). In reading, far fewer pupils than nationally reached the higher levels. At Key Stage 2, attainment was average in English but well below average in mathematics and science. Boys achieved particularly well in English but poorly in the other subjects. Achievement between Key Stage 1 and the end of Key Stage 2 was exceptionally low in mathematics and science but satisfactory in English.

The school predicts that the 2007 results at Key Stage 2 will be slightly lower in English than in 2006 and slightly higher in mathematics. It expects to miss the targets which were set using comparisons with pupils in similar schools. At Key Stage 1, the results are expected to be much lower than last year's but the acting headteacher thinks the teachers may have been too cautious in their predictions.

Despite some data which suggests that most pupils are beginning to meet narrowly defined curricular targets in literacy and numeracy, the pupils continue to make inadequate progress in many lessons. Standards remain below average overall and the pupils' achievement from their starting points is inadequate.

### Personal development and well-being

The pupils continue to behave well and are extremely polite and welcoming. Their attitudes to learning are positive and relationships with adults and each other are good. Nevertheless, conduct at playtime is boisterous, resulting in a high number of minor accidents. Behaviour was very good in an assembly led by pupils in the Reception classes and all pupils showed positive attitudes and a developing confidence.

### Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning remains inadequate. The school is aware that the work in several classes is unsatisfactory but has not clearly identified the true extent of inadequacies. Just under half of the 19 lessons seen by the inspectors were inadequate. Examples of weak teaching were seen in all year groups apart from Year 6 and the Foundation Stage. Lessons often lacked a clear purpose and allowed the pupils to work too slowly. Expectations about the pitch of the work and the quality of what the pupils produced were

generally low. Teaching assistants were regularly deployed to little effect and, in the worst cases, did not intervene to influence the quality of learning. Lesson plans often made too little distinction between the needs of pupils of varying abilities, which resulted in some groups underperforming and others being confused by what they were required to do. Several teachers tried to cover too much ground in a well intentioned attempt to enrich learning. There were few instances of teachers commenting precisely on what pupils had or had not achieved.

Six lessons were of good or better quality. These teachers had a good grasp of what they wanted the pupils to achieve and questioned them confidently to draw out their understanding. Explanations were snappy and were followed by a range of relevant activities and changes of pace to maintain interest. Crucially, the teachers built in times for learning points to be revisited and consolidated. The school's participation in the intensifying support project has increased the teachers' focus on structuring lessons around short term learning objectives. They are becoming better at tracking progress against very specific targets within the programme. By themselves, however, these aspects of teaching are not enough to ensure that all lessons are of at least satisfactory quality.

The provision for pupils with learning difficulties has some strengths and in the better teaching of the lower attaining groups, these pupils made satisfactory progress. However, in the afternoon the quality of learning deteriorates significantly because the school is unable to provide teaching assistants to support these groups. Pupils who do not have learning difficulties but who have fallen behind in their work are not catered for adequately. The school knows that the way it used to teach phonics (the way that sounds are represented by combinations of letters) has left several pupils from Year 2 onwards with gaps in their understanding. There is no systematic programme to remedy this matter.

The quality of care, guidance and support has improved but, unacceptably, some of the health and safety issues identified in October have not been dealt with fully. Some minor risks, such as a gap in a fence, are still present and action over problems with the playground, for instance drainage, has been slow. Suitable child protection arrangements are in place and there are regular fire drills. The school now has an appropriate system for carrying out and recording the required checks on staff but the intention to include all governors has not been carried through fully yet.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2006:

- ensure that procedures for safeguarding pupils are implemented rigorously – inadequate

- ensure teachers set suitably challenging tasks for pupils and increase the progress made in lessons, especially in mathematics and science – inadequate.

## Leadership and management

The temporary arrangements since November have been less than ideal and leadership and management remain inadequate. The positive impact of the acting headteacher's arrival after Christmas has been diluted by his return to his substantive post for part of each week. His time has often been taken up with management tasks which have accumulated during his absence. The senior leadership team has not established itself as an effective driving force for improvement and has not worked with a clarity of purpose. It has played little, if any, part in devising, coordinating, monitoring or evaluating whole school strategies to lift provision and performance. Development work which might have taken place, for example using a thoughtful analysis of assessment practice carried out in December, has not been taken forward.

The acting headteacher has observed lessons and gained an overview of the teaching as well as taking part in the LA's review. He has a sound understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses but there has been no regular monitoring in a systematic manner to follow up areas for development. The coordinators of the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science are keen to give an appropriate lead and have led staff meetings and carried out some limited monitoring of the pupils' work and of planning. Their efforts need to be set more clearly within a coherent whole school framework of development which goes beyond the LA's plan for the intensifying support programme.

The chair of governors was appointed by the LA as an additional governor. He has extensive experience, an ambitious vision for the school, and a realistic understanding of how this is to be achieved. Along with the other governors, his decisive actions have ensured that the school can start the summer term led by a substantive headteacher with a good track record of leading schools out of failure.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in October 2006:

- carry out more rigorous monitoring of teaching to identify exactly where weaknesses lie. Draw up and implement plans to rectify the weaknesses – inadequate.

## External support

The local authority was frustrated by its inability to recruit quickly a suitable acting headteacher from within Wolverhampton. To its credit, it successfully

negotiated the secondment of an experienced headteacher from a neighbouring LA.

The local authority's statement of action was inadequate when first submitted to Ofsted and was revised at the beginning of January in the light of feedback from HMI about its many weaknesses. The statement was improved and is judged to be satisfactory but lacking in detail. For instance, the proposed support for the senior leadership team is too narrow and lacks definition. (Who will be supported? How? When?) The governing body appears to be unaware of the statement of action. In practice, most of the LA's support has been coordinated through a raising attainment plan (RAP) which underpins the intensifying support programme. This plan is broadly relevant to the school's needs but does not focus specifically on the key issue about leadership. Although subject coordinators have benefited from working alongside the LA's consultants, there has been little support or direction given to senior leaders who, for much of the time since the school went into special measures, have been left to determine their own course. The LA's extensive review of teaching and learning identified pertinent strengths and weaknesses but did not make an overall judgement about the school's progress or highlight the implications of its findings for the senior leadership team.

A task group of senior officers from the LA has met twice to evaluate the school's progress and coordinate support. Its evaluations have not been crisp or resulted in a swift response to failings in the school. Its minutes do not record summary judgements about progress on each of the key issues or the school's progress overall, nor do they refer clearly to the success criteria in the statement of action or RAP. The chair of governors reports that he has been frustrated by the lack of urgency the LA has given to rectifying some of the matters identified as risks on the site and discussed at the task group. The task group has not challenged the school sufficiently. For example, it has too readily accepted a lowering of targets for Year 6 when, in the circumstances, the reverse might have been expected. The LA's support to the school is inadequate.

### Main Judgements

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Urgently devise an action plan which focuses precisely on the issues identified in the section 5 inspection report.
- The LA needs to ensure that its support and evaluations are better focused and more effective in bringing about speedy improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Children's Services for Wolverhampton.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hubbleday  
H M Inspector