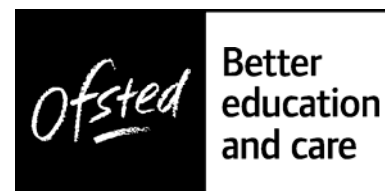


Preston Support Centre
Ringway House
Ringway
Preston
Lancashire
PR1 3HQ

Direct Tel 0800 389 5686
Direct Fax 01772 565353/565299

www.ofsted.gov.uk



5 July 2005

Mr T J Hill
Headteacher
Little Harrowden Primary School
School Lane
Little Harrowden
Wellingborough
Northamptonshire
NN9 5BN

Dear Mr Hill

Implementation of Little Harrowden Community Primary School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 29 and 30 June 2005, I write to confirm the findings and to notify you of the outcomes.

As you know, the inspection was part of a policy involving a broader series of visits by HMI and Additional Inspectors to check on the development and improvement of schools which have been designated by their section 10 inspection as having serious weaknesses. You will recall that the focus of the inspection was to assess: the quality of the action plan; 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 and removing the causes of the serious weaknesses.

During the visit I inspected 11 lessons or part lessons; attended two registration periods and an assembly; scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school; and held discussions with you and nominated staff on the areas for improvement identified in the section 10 inspection. I also examined a range of pupils' work and spoke informally with other staff and pupils.

On the basis of the evidence gathered during the visit, I made the following observations to you, the chair of governors and a representative of the LEA.

The most recent validated test results at Key Stage 1 (2004) show a drop from those of previous years. Where they have been consistently well above average, test results in 2004 at Year 2 were average for reading and writing but above average for mathematics. Test results for pupils in Year 6 show that standards are average for English and science but are above average for mathematics. However,

when compared with the pupils' performance at Year 2 improvement is well below average for English and science and below average for mathematics. Pupils did not achieve sufficiently highly in any of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and progress between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 was poor.

Current standards at Year 2 are above average in reading and mathematics and average for writing. At Year 6 standards have improved and are above average in English and well above average in mathematics and science when compared with national averages from last year.

Pupils in the reception class make good progress and most are in line to attain the Early Learning Goals for children of this age by the time they enter Year 1. The pupils' personal and social development is very good. Children relate well to each other, understand classroom routines and settle quickly to their tasks.

In English, pupils' speaking and listening skills are good. Pupils speak fluently and explain their answers with clarity. Most pupils make good contributions to lessons, listen well and show they are concentrating on what others are saying. Teachers often use short sessions of paired or group discussions as parts of lessons. Where the teachers' questioning allows pupils to give longer and more structured answers, pupils are developing into confident speakers. Reading is good with average and above average ability pupils reading with fluency and expression. Older pupils compare books by the same author. They express preferences and are able to explain their reasons for this.

English books show a range of work but the best quality is seen in pupils' personal writing books rather than the exercises in their literacy books. In some classes, an over-emphasis on language exercises limits the development and consolidation of literacy skills. There are fewer examples of pupils drafting or editing their work to improve its quality. However, where this is seen it is proving a very powerful tool to promote progress and achievement. Pupils' work is neat and well formed. However, many pupils have poor pencil grip which slows their rate of work.

Pupils spell common words accurately and make good attempts at more complex words but some have few strategies for tackling new words. Often their understanding of common spelling rules is weak. Pupils are not sufficiently secure in using punctuation. Older, higher attaining pupils use a range of punctuation, including commas, question marks and speech. However, some younger pupils are not yet secure on the accurate use of capital letters and full stops.

In mathematics, pupils are generally confident in their number work, and by the end of Key Stage 2, have a good grasp of number and a range of strategies for working out answers. Standards at Year 2 are above the national average. Pupils' oral and mental skills are generally good and most have the rapid recall of the necessary tables and number bonds they need to make their working effective. The oral, mental sessions at the start of lessons are done well, but there are still some areas of development in the part of the lesson where pupils work

independently to ensure the work is always appropriately matched to pupils' prior attainment. Throughout the school the pupils' work is neatly set down, and shows a good understanding of place value.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in ten of the 11 lessons observed with good teaching seen in eight lessons. Where teaching was weaker, teachers' expectations were too low, and the work failed to engage or challenge all of the pupils; for example, some of the worksheets used were unnecessary for the points being taught. These limited pupils' responses and gave them little opportunity to use the skills they are developing in a wider context.

In the most effective lessons, teaching had a brisk pace and set clear targets, although few lessons gave the pupils guidance about how much time they had to complete their tasks. The teachers had a secure knowledge of the subject and used accurate vocabulary. Introductions to lessons and plenary sessions at the end were used well and teachers questioned pupils effectively to extend their thinking.

The teachers used effective strategies to manage pupils' learning, involving them actively in the lesson during literacy and numeracy lessons. Good use was made of 'response partners' to help pupils clarify their ideas before offering them in front of the whole class. Planning was good with some detailed planning for English and mathematics. Several teachers, having evaluated progress in the previous lesson, revised their planning for the following session to reinforce points that the pupils had not firmly grasped; this is good practice.

Learning objectives were almost always shared with the pupils or returned to at the end of the lesson to check on the gains pupils had made. Teachers identified relevant learning objectives and generally framed them in language that was easily understood by the pupils. Occasionally because of poor timing of the introductions pupils did not have sufficient time to complete the tasks set for them during the independent part of the lesson.

Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and make supportive comments. In the best examples these also contained evaluative comments giving the pupils a clear indication of what they needed to do to improve their work. However, there were fewer indications that pupils had responded to the teachers' comments. Targets in pupils' English books were helpful in giving them guidance on what they need to do to improve their work and move to the higher levels. However, the use of some of these targets was not evident in all of the marking seen and did not always match the needs of the pupils as seen through the scrutiny of pupils' work.

The pupils made satisfactory or good progress in all but one of the lessons, with good progress being seen in eight. The rate of progress matched the quality of teaching.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons was good and often very good. Pupils were unfailingly polite. Behaviour in the playground was good and movement around the school

sensible and orderly. Entry to school after break times executed well and lunchtime was a suitably social occasion. Pupils responded well to the quality of teaching and most teachers built on these positive attitudes well. Pupils settled quickly to their work and co-operated effectively. Assembly had a suitably reverent atmosphere and sense of occasion and helped to develop pupils' spiritual awareness. Well-chosen music added an additional cultural dimension.

The headteacher continues to drive forward initiatives to improve the quality of education. There is a relentless focus on raising standards for all pupils. With good support from all staff, this has given positive direction to the school's work. There is a clear agenda for improving the quality of education. Good systems are in place to monitor key aspects of the school's work. Good relationships have been established with staff and pupils, and a good, supportive atmosphere has been created, which is now encouraging higher expectations.

The monitoring systems enable the senior staff to gain a clear view of the quality of teaching and learning. There is a good action plan for monitoring performance and tracking progress through the school with clear targets and success criteria. Regular, systematic and rigorous monitoring of lessons, teachers' planning and pupils' written work maintains a robust focus between good teaching and effective learning. The outcomes of this monitoring are being used to develop teachers' skills and knowledge. Strengths and weaknesses are clearly identified and feedback focuses clearly on activities that are either helpful or impeding pupils' progress.

There are good systems in place to evaluate and track pupils' attainment. Assessment information is used to identify gaps in their knowledge and understanding, make changes to teachers' medium and short-term plans and match the work more carefully to their different attainment levels. The use of this information to inform the next steps in the pupils' learning is now much more secure.

The subject leaders have clear job descriptions that show their responsibilities and all have drawn up appropriate subject action plans. They now have a clearer view of the rates of pupils' progress and what specific actions need to be taken to tackle weaknesses in teaching and learning. Their own management skills have been enhanced and their understanding of the data and their analysis of this much more sophisticated.

The governing body has an appropriate committee structure and is very supportive of the work of the school. The governors are well informed and many are directly involved in the governance of the school, successfully developing their role as a 'critical friend'. Many governors are relatively inexperienced. However, training undertaken by the governing body has given them a more secure understanding of their role. The governing body's systems for monitoring its own effectiveness are underdeveloped.

The school's action plan is clearly set out and deals appropriately with each of the improvements needed. It identifies the responsible person, the resources needed and the timescale. There are clear, measurable success criteria and processes for evaluating progress, including dates and personnel. The school's self-evaluation of progress to date is good and gives clear evidence as to the steps taken, their impact and what needs to be done next. This is beginning to translate into improvement to standards across the school and there are clear signs of more rapid progress in pupils' achievement.

The LEA's commentary is good and clearly outlines the action it intends to take and the resources needed. Through monitoring, practical advice on teaching and learning, planning and general management, the LEA has provided good support since the inspection in line with its stated action plan. This support will continue to be given for the foreseeable future.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: improve the quality and consistency of teaching, particularly in Year 3 to 6.

This has mainly been dealt with above and progress is good.

2: ensure accurate assessments are used to accelerate progress, so that the pupils achieve high standards by the end of Year 6

This has mainly been dealt with above. While achievement is not yet at the expected level by Year 6, standards are improving and the rate of pupils' progress is increasing.

Progress is reasonable.

3: tracking and analysing the pupils' progress with greater vigour

This has been evaluated above. Progress is good.

4: developing the expertise of subject leaders so that they contribute effectively to the management of the school

This is mainly dealt with above. Progress is reasonable.

Overall good progress has been made in implementing the action plan and removing the causes of the school's serious weaknesses.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Corporate Director – Education Services for Northamptonshire. This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Francis
Additional Inspector

cc: chair of governors
LEA