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Mr C Pegman
Headteacher
Alderman Bolton Community Primary School
Longdin Street
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Dear Mr Pegman

Implementation of Alderman Bolton Community School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 18 and 19 April 2005, with my colleague Mr P Playfair, Additional Inspector, 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 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 we inspected 17 lessons or part lessons; attended three registration periods and an assembly; scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school; and held discussions with you, senior managers (the review team), the chair of the governing body and representatives of the LEA on the areas for improvement identified in the section 10 inspection. We 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, we made the following observations to you, the chair of the governing body and two representatives of the LEA.

As reported after the last visit, limited progress had been made in removing the causes of the school's weaknesses and additional concerns were expressed about the quality of leadership and management. Since that time the school has experienced significant turbulence as a result of the resignation of the headteacher

in February 2005. An experienced headteacher from another school within the authority is temporarily in charge of the school. A permanent headteacher has been appointed who will take up post in September.

The pupils' results in the 2004 end-of-Key Stage tests were reported on after the previous monitoring visit. The pupils continue to receive a good start to school life in the Foundation Unit. In the majority of lessons observed in Key Stage 1, pupils were working at, or close to, the standards expected nationally. This was not the case in Year 1 in science and Year 2 in mathematics. In Key Stage 2, standards were below average in almost all lessons which reflects the legacy of insufficiently demanding teaching. Nevertheless throughout the school most pupils were making at least satisfactory progress and it was often good in Key Stage 1.

The school continues to provide a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils. Teaching and learning were good or better in five of the 17 lessons, satisfactory in ten, but unsatisfactory in two. This is not so good a picture as that seen at the time of the last visit. Less good quality teaching has been seen. Strengths in the teaching included giving time for children to develop their ideas and to give reasons for their answers; questioning that took account of different abilities and literacy levels; precise learning objectives; and clear expectations of what the pupils could achieve. Classroom support is generally used well. In the best lessons, a very good balance of introductory learning activities set the scene for the productive development of the lesson. The learning activities then challenged the pupils to think for themselves and to discuss and share ideas. Precise questioning and the constant reinforcement of language and technical skills enabled the pupils to make good progress and to achieve well.

A number of important weaknesses, seen in both satisfactory and unsatisfactory lessons, continue to frustrate the efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Introductions can be too long and dominated by teacher talk. Lesson planning, although acknowledging the fact that the pupils have preferred styles of learning, is rarely precise enough to ensure that activities meet those different needs in terms of content and approach. On several occasions, where the pupils could have worked harder, there was a lack of challenge in the planned lesson. At other times the pupils were happier when the teacher directed their learning rather than when they were expected to work independently or in small groups. In particular, the higher attaining pupils were insufficiently challenged. There is little evidence of assessment data being used to plan learning activities. Teachers failed to check frequently on the pupils' understanding to prevent them from compounding their mistakes. Questioning too often failed to exploit what pupils know, understand and can do. Plenaries do not always provide an opportunity for pupils to review what has been learned. As a result, the pupils then leave the lesson not knowing where their work will be taking them next time. Although most teachers are regularly using the interactive whiteboard, insufficient thought is being given as to how this technology can support different approaches to learning.

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour continue to be good. In almost all lessons most pupils were keen to work, concentrated well, shared ideas, and showed a growing confidence to put forward thoughts and suggest answers. The problem of some pupils becoming bored and restless continues to be a feature of a few lessons. At times this was because the teacher took too long to introduce the lesson or failed to raise the tempo of the lesson, especially when asking questions during the plenary. Overall, the pupils are considerate of one another, well organised and in some lessons can take responsibility for the work of a small group. Behaviour at break and lunchtime was very good. The pupils played happily together in the playground where levels of adult supervision provided good security.

The leadership and management of the acting headteacher are good. Although in post for less than three months, he has produced a more sharply focused action plan. This has only just been published and further refinements are imminent to clarify some success criteria, identify appropriate milestones to measure progress, and outline clear structures of monitoring and evaluation. The acting headteacher is effectively prioritising the school's work with an emphasis on the improvement of teaching and learning. He recognises the need to develop the leadership skills of senior managers and subject co-ordinators as a matter of urgency for the summer term, in order to build the school's capacity for greater and quicker improvement. Appropriate training, delivered by an advanced skills teacher from the LEA, has already been initiated to improve subject co-ordinators' awareness of their role and responsibilities. The acting headteacher has a secure appreciation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Lesson observations are more evaluative and tied to a series of central expectations. However, this work is in its infancy. The action plan recognises the need to establish an effective self-evaluation schedule promptly.

The governing body is strengthened by the appointment of two experienced LEA governors. The acting headteacher is providing more detailed and reliable information. However, despite recent improvement, the OFSTED Action Plan Group has not been sufficiently effective in monitoring the plan's implementation. The chair of governors well understands the school's strengths and weaknesses and is actively putting into place procedures to better monitor its performance, for example, regular reports from subject co-ordinators. He acknowledges the need to develop the skills of other governors, particularly those who chair sub-committees. Most of these sub-committees perform a useful role but the pastoral care sub-committee dissipates the energies of staff and governors at a time when the focus needs to be on rapid school improvement.

The LEA has a candid appreciation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Training on teaching and learning styles in the early part of the academic year is beginning to have an impact on classroom practice, although many teachers are applying the strategies superficially. The recent reintroduction of consultancy visits is welcomed by the school and is supporting improvement. However, much work

remains to be done to build the capacity of the school's current and future leaders, and to ensure greater consistency of teaching and learning strategies across all classroom practitioners.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: Raise the standards in English, mathematics and science through the school

The school has replaced individual action plans for English, mathematics and science with a more appropriate focus on monitoring and raising standards across the subjects. Data on the performance of the pupils is being collected on a half-termly basis to enable class teachers to identify underachievement. A range of intervention strategies are employed to improve the work of identified pupils. It is too soon to measure the impact of this work on attainment. However, the school is significantly modifying its own procedures as a result of each new cycle of data collected. The acting headteacher intends to hold individual teachers more directly accountable for the progress of their classes in order that the majority of the pupils progress by at least two National Curriculum sub-levels in each year. The marking of the pupils' work is often insufficiently rigorous in recognising their achievement and specifically identifying areas for further improvement.

Much residual underachievement remains, particularly in Key Stage 2. Progress on this area for improvement is limited.

2: Improve the quality of teaching and learning to prevent underachievement by any group of pupils

The school has not sustained the proportion of good or better teaching seen at the time of the last visit. There is not enough good teaching. The school has recognised that more training is needed to help teachers plan a variety of approaches to pitch lessons in a way that better meets the range of ability in their classes. Greater attention is now being given to sharing good practice. Although the review team has too generous a view of the amount of good or better teaching, it has correctly identified the key features of weak teaching. Further training is required to enable senior leaders to accurately and consistently judge the quality of teaching and learning. New monitoring procedures introduced by the acting headteacher have brought a sharper focus to monitoring classroom practice and have promoted the value of self-assessment. The school does not at present have an up-to-date profile of the quality of teaching and learning. The school is actively using advice and support from primary consultants and advanced skills teachers in seeking to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Progress on this area is limited.

3: Continue to work hard to promote good attendance and focus on those parents who do not ensure that their children attend regularly

Despite a suitable range of rewards, intervention strategies, and more rigorous monitoring of attendance, there has been some worsening of the attendance figures for the current academic year. Overall attendance is now 91.7 per cent, a figure well below the national median. Unauthorised absence is very high at 2.4 per cent. Of particular concern is the poor attendance of children under five years of age. The rate of attendance does improve as the pupils progress through the school. There is evidence that some parents are taking a more responsible attitude towards informing the school about their children's absence. The school is hoping to use the soon to be opened adjacent Children's Centre to provide parenting classes which challenge the longstanding casual attitude that a significant minority of parents have towards ensuring that their children attend school regularly. The school appreciates the need to set interim targets for attendance and to analyse the attendance patterns of individual classes. The school is now more rigorous in its procedures to record late arrivals to school. As a result the incidence of lateness has increased since the last visit.

Progress on this area is limited.

Overall, limited progress has been made since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses. However, the acting headteacher has provided significant impetus based on a revised and effective action plan which has established the foundations to enable the school to further accelerate the rate of recent improvements and remove its serious weaknesses within the next twelve months.

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

Yours sincerely

David Simpson
HM Inspector of Schools