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Mrs M Palmer
Headteacher
Harvington CofE First School
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Dear Mrs Palmer

Implementation of Harvington C of E First School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 16 and 17 May 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 eight 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 deputy headteacher, the chair of governors and representatives of the LEA and the Diocese of Worcester.

Standards are rising and more pupils are making better progress than at the time of the previous inspection, particularly the older pupils in Years 4 and 5. In reading, writing and mathematics nearly all the pupils in Years 1 and 2 are

expected to achieve or exceed the levels for their ages by the end of the school year; in Years 3 and 4 almost 70 per cent of the pupils are on course to reach the level expected for their age. While standards in Year 5 remain too low, with only just over half the pupils predicted to achieve the level expected for their age, their rate of progress has increased since the autumn term 2004 and more pupils are achieving the higher levels. Standards in lessons were generally in line with age related expectations; many of the pupils in reception, Years 1, 2 and 3 achieve good standards in writing although the quality of writing in Years 4 and 5 is weaker, and standards are too low, particularly in handwriting, sentence structure and grammar.

The pupils' attitudes, their behaviour and their personal development are very good; this is a strong feature of the school's provision. The pupils are extremely polite, good humoured, courteous and welcoming to visitors. Many talked confidently about their work and are keen to succeed. The relationships between pupils and adults are good and based on mutual respect and a high level of care. The pupils behave well, generally listen attentively, work hard and enjoy coming to school.

The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good; the local environment and community are used well to increase the pupils' understanding about their own background and there are also opportunities for the pupils to learn about other cultures and faiths. An assembly made a positive contribution to the pupils' spiritual development.

The pupils' attendance for the period from September 2004 to March 2005 was 91 per cent; this was low and well below the national average for primary schools, which is 94.5 per cent. The pupils' attendance for the term so far is 96 per cent which is high and a significant improvement from the previous term.

The quality of teaching was good in four lessons and satisfactory in four lessons; it was consistently good in reception and for the older pupils in Years 4 and 5. There were also some good features in each of the other lessons that were judged to be satisfactory.

In the best lessons the teachers' expectations of the pupils' behaviour and their academic attainment were high; questions were used very effectively to probe the pupils' understanding and challenge their thinking, and the teachers' subject knowledge was good. The pupils' tasks were matched well to their different levels of prior attainment, ensuring that they received a good level of challenge and support. Interesting and stimulating contexts motivated the pupils to try to do their best; teaching assistants made a very positive contribution, either by direct teaching or repeating and rephrasing the teachers' questions. Learning objectives were used effectively to underpin the pupils' tasks and to reinforce important teaching points; information and communication technology (ICT) was used well to support and promote the pupils' learning.

Some of the characteristics of the less effective lessons were: missed opportunities to teach important skills and concepts; some confusion between the pupils' activities and what they were expected to learn; a slower pace of learning; class routines that were not established securely; an acceptance of low level disruption; lesson introductions that were too long and not enough attention being given to the pupils' different learning needs, particularly the higher attaining pupils.

The curriculum is generally broad and balanced and is meeting the learning needs of most of the pupils; a range of stimulating and interesting contexts for learning is planned for each year group and these are generally motivating the pupils to achieve well. The pupils' ICT skills are improving in many subjects, particularly in English, mathematics and history. Curriculum planning and assessment arrangements in ICT have also improved; important revisions to the teachers' timetables to increase teaching time in the ICT suite are expected to be introduced at the beginning of the autumn term 2005. These are very positive developments.

The procedures for assessing the pupils' attainment and tracking their progress are satisfactory overall and developing well; they provide a secure basis for further improvement and present a generally clear picture of the progress made by individuals and groups of pupils. Some of the analyses of pupils' responses to tests, such as in English, are very good. However, the pupils' targets for improvement are not always high enough, and do not always take sufficient account of their prior attainment; similarly the assessment data used by the school is at times overly complicated, and too little attention has been given to summarising the information available to show where standards are too low, higher than expected and where rates of progress are good or limited. There is currently not a sufficiently systematic assessment of the pupils' attainment when they enter the nursery class; as a result, the school does not have a clear enough picture of the pupils' different levels of achievement against which to measure their progress throughout the year.

The provision in the reception class is very good and in the nursery class it is satisfactory with some good features. Many of the pupils in the reception class make very good progress, especially in writing. The quality of the learning environment in both the nursery class and reception is very good; the youngest pupils are given a very good range of stimulating activities to promote their learning, particularly in their creative, personal, social and emotional development. Nevertheless in the nursery there is an over emphasis on the pupils' self selecting activities without sufficient adult intervention and guidance to ensure that basic skills are taught systematically, particularly in language and literacy. The very good and relevant opportunities for learning that are planned in detail are not always realised and monitored carefully enough.

The headteacher provides sound, determined and effective leadership. She receives good support from the deputy headteacher and together they form a strong partnership; they have led and managed the school well since the previous inspection. They are supported well by a senior teacher who has responsibility for

leading improvement in mathematics. Staff morale is generally good and most teachers are working increasingly effectively as a team committed to the school's improvement. The induction and mentoring of a newly qualified teacher is managed very well by the deputy headteacher. Both leadership and management are satisfactory overall, with some good features, such as the headteacher's unequivocal drive to improve the quality of education. There is a clear sense of educational direction although, as the headteacher recognises, there is still much to do in order to raise expectations further and ensure a more rigorous focus on raising standards at all levels of the school's work.

There is a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation; the headteacher and deputy headteacher are taking a clear lead to identify strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching and the curriculum. Monitoring activities have rightly focused on observing lessons, checking teachers' planning and scrutinising the pupils' written work. These have led to some useful analyses of the pupils' attainment and achievement, particularly in writing and mathematics. Nevertheless, although teachers have been given some helpful feedback about their work, there has been very little focus on standards and progress in lessons; similarly the areas identified for the teachers' development are too broad, targets for improvement are not made sufficiently clear or given a priority, and there are few review dates that reflect a sense of urgency about when improvements should occur.

Strategic planning is satisfactory; the three-year school improvement plan and action plan are being revised and a new school development plan, which gives greater emphasis to self evaluation, is expected to be completed by the end of the summer term 2005. Three teachers are currently appointed on short term temporary contracts to cover the long term absence of two substantive staff and a vacancy caused by the resignation of another teacher. The headteacher, with the support of the deputy headteacher, governors and LEA is managing this high level of staff absence well. There is a projected budget deficit of £15000; this has been agreed with the LEA, is being managed well and the governors and headteacher are confident that it will be reduced significantly by no later than December 2005, at which time all staffing issues should be resolved. The school is well placed to improve further and its capacity to improve is satisfactory.

The chair of governors provides good support to the headteacher and sound leadership to the governing body. Governors' committees are increasingly active and beginning to play a significant part in monitoring the quality of education, particularly the curriculum committee. Links have been established between individual governors and subject co-ordinators, and some governors have visited the school to monitor progress against the action plan.

The school's action plan provides a broadly satisfactory framework for improvement but there are very few measurable and quantifiable success criteria, which is a significant weakness. This is inhibiting the headteacher's and governor's ability to

regularly monitor and evaluate the impact of actions, particularly in relation to raising standards, and in the medium and short term.

The LEA's commentary and statement of action are satisfactory. The commentary provides an overview of the school's context prior to and immediately following the section 10 inspection and sets out a clear appraisal of its future. There is a systematic programme of monitoring, intervention and support which includes an appropriate allocation of resources. The LEA has identified weaknesses in the school's action plan and these are generally consistent with HMI's judgements; nevertheless the LEA does not make it sufficiently clear how it expects to help the governors and headteacher overcome the weaknesses. Similarly the LEA's action plan contains very few measurable success criteria to track the school's progress in raising standards and eliminating underachievement for the older pupils, particularly in the short term. The LEA has not met two important commitments as set out in its statement of action; these are, setting the headteacher specific tasks with clear guidelines, and establishing regular half-term evaluations of progress by a core group of LEA officers and advisers.

The LEA's support for the school is satisfactory; recent reviews of teaching and learning and monitoring and evaluation have provided a helpful overview of the quality of education and given the school a useful evaluation of progress. The areas for development identified in the reviews are generally consistent with HMI's inspection evidence.

Action taken to address the areas for improvement

1: ensure that teaching and the curriculum meet the needs of the older pupils in the school so that standards are raised and underachievement is eradicated

There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching and the curriculum for the older pupils; standards are beginning to rise and the legacy of underachievement is being tackled satisfactorily. Reasonable progress has been made to address this area for improvement.

2: improve the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and the curriculum so that weaknesses are identified quickly and effective action is taken to rectify them

There has been reasonable progress in this area for improvement.

3: increase the opportunities for pupils to use and develop their ICT skills across the subjects

Good progress has been made to develop the pupils' ICT skills across the curriculum.

Reasonable progress has been made in implementing the action plan and removing the causes of the school's serious weaknesses. There is an increasing awareness of the school's strengths and shortcomings, and under the resolute leadership of the headteacher there is a strong determination to improve further.

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

Yours sincerely

ANDREW WATTERS
HM Inspector of Schools