



14 June 2005

Mr D A Sergeant
Headteacher
Merdon Junior School
Merdon Avenue
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SO53 1EJ

Dear Mr Sergeant

Implementation of Merdon Junior School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 18 and 19 May, with my colleague Anne Johns, 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 where the section 10 inspection indicated that the school was underachieving. You will recall that the aims of the visit were to assess the progress made in addressing and eliminating underachievement and meeting the targets given in the action plan. We also evaluated standards of achievement and the quality of education, especially in relation to areas of underachievement.

During the visit we inspected 18 lessons or part lessons; attended several registration periods, an assembly; scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school; and held discussions with yourself, the chair of the governing body and nominated staff on the causes and areas of underachievement. We also examined a range of the 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 deputy headteacher, the chair of the governing body, and two representatives of the local education authority (LEA).

The school's action plan is good. It has a clear format and each area for improvement is covered in appropriate detail. The plan contains a good range of manageable actions with clear success criteria identified; their order is logical and indicates how the school will proceed to eradicate underachievement. A chart clearly marks the anticipated timescale for each action and is helpful for tracking progress.

Those responsible for ensuring that the actions take place are identified, as are any others involved. Arrangements for monitoring, review and evaluation are clearly identified and the school has been rigorous in tracking the progress made in implementing the actions.

The results in the national tests in 2004 indicated that the pupils attained above average scores when national comparisons were made. When compared with similar schools the results were average in the core subjects; when prior attainment was taken into account the results in English were average but in mathematics and science they were below average. The proportion of the pupils attaining the higher Level 5 was just below the national figures in English, mathematics and science. The school has carefully tracked the progress made by the pupils over this academic year and has data which suggests that the school's results are improving and that the future trend over time is likely to be upward.

The school has introduced clear and effective procedures for tracking the pupils' progress, ensuring that any underachievement is recognised and acted upon. The school has compiled a useful bank of assessment data of which it is making effective use. National and optional test results are analysed and the information is used to: set agreed targets; place pupils in appropriate teaching groups for mathematics and English; and allocate support. Teachers have benefited from useful training; in addition, helpful work has taken place in assessing and agreeing the levels of the pupils' work to ensure that teachers have consistency in their expectations.

The assessment policy is a useful document, which provides clear guidance for the staff. The pupils are increasingly involved in assessing their own work and each other's, which has a positive impact on their learning. The teachers identify assessment opportunities in their planning and in the best lessons make use of assessment information to move the learning on. Most marking is informative and helps the pupils understand what they need to do to improve, although this is not consistent in each class.

Standards reached national expectations in all of the lessons. The proportion of the pupils attaining above age-related expectations in lessons is improving as the school makes more effective use of the information it has gathered. In about a third of the lessons, standards were above average. The progress the pupils make is at least sound and is often good or very good. The teachers have high expectations.

Standards in English at the end of Key Stage 2 are generally at national expectations, with an increasing proportion of the pupils achieving at the higher levels. The lower attaining pupils in Year 6 have made very good progress and, as

a result of the excellent teaching, about half of them are likely to achieve average standards. The school's provision in English has improved and this is reflected in lessons and in the books of most pupils in the majority of classes. The quality of teaching ranged from satisfactory to excellent.

The pupils speak confidently and eloquently and the teachers provide a varied range of quality speaking and listening opportunities; such as, when the pupils discuss their work in pairs and groups or when dramatic techniques are used to enhance the learning experience. The majority of the pupils work productively and with great interest in activities which stimulate their imagination and take account of their interests, such as in a Year 5 class, where the pupils gave very active responses. Across the school, the written work was generally well presented though a few pupils, in some classes, were careless and did not take enough care with their work and made mistakes in spelling common words. In one class, the teacher did not provide a good model of writing on the whiteboard. The pupils cover a good range of work in their books and have the opportunity to write for a variety of purposes. Although many pupils demonstrated confident and accurate reading, the school has made plans to improve provision during the guided reading periods which were not observed during this visit. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) as a teaching tool for English is underdeveloped.

In mathematics and science most of the pupils are working at average standards, although an increasing proportion achieve standards which are above average, and make good progress in lessons. Many pupils solve problems using the four rules of number; they use correct mathematical language and calculate accurately. The pupils are more confident at explaining and showing how they have worked out their answers. The teaching is good overall with some very good and excellent teaching, which is having a positive impact on standards.

In science, many pupils have a good breadth of knowledge and are developing their investigation skills through a range of practical work. Previous gaps in the science curriculum have been identified and steps taken to ensure that all aspects of the curriculum are now covered.

The pupils' personal development continues to be a strength of the school. There is a very positive ethos of mutual respect and understanding and relationships are very good. The pupils are keen to learn and work hard in lessons. In classes and around school the pupils are polite, courteous and good humoured and they behave very well. Attendance is well above average and there have been no exclusions in the past year.

The quality of teaching is good overall. It was satisfactory or better in all of the 18 lessons. Two lessons were excellent, two were very good, nine good and five

satisfactory. The quality of the teaching and learning was closely linked. Where the teaching was effective and well focused, the pupils made sustained progress during the lesson. The pupils were keen learners and responded well to the wide range of teaching and learning strategies used in the most successful lessons. Many sustained good levels of concentration as they completed their work.

In the best lessons, the teachers had planned activities which made effective use of the pupils' own interests and ideas. Planning was generally of a good quality; it identified assessment opportunities and how the lesson would cater for the full range of the pupils' needs. The teachers used a wide range of strategies to maintain the pupils' interest and to challenge their thinking. Expectations were high. The teachers gave clear instructions and maintained a good pace to their lessons. Relationships between the pupils and the teachers were very good. The support staff were used well when lessons included their contribution.

Although no lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory, some weaknesses occurred. Questions were not always productive in making the pupils think more deeply about topics; sometimes answers were sought from too small a sample of the pupils meaning that too many were passive. In some lessons, the challenge for the higher attaining pupils had not been carefully planned, or the pace was slow, which resulted in the pupils being less interested.

The curriculum has been carefully considered and has been restructured to meet statutory requirements. It has been evaluated to ensure that it is broad and balanced and reflects cross-curricular aspects as well as 'Excellence and Enjoyment'. It is driven by leading questions and the curriculum and development team carefully monitor the medium and long-term plans. This has improved the provision in most subjects.

The headteacher provides good leadership and, since his return to school, has worked diligently to improve the provision and tackle the causes of underachievement. He is ably supported by the deputy headteacher who ensured that the headteacher was fully informed of all developments while she acted as headteacher. She had set up a range of effective systems to monitor and evaluate the provision which are now being embedded across the school. Together, they have formed a very effective team and they display very high levels of professional rigour in their approach. There is great clarity and vision as to what needs to be done next to address underachievement. The phase and subject leaders are developing clear systems to monitor and evaluate standards and provision: these are being shared across the school.

The systems for monitoring and evaluation are comprehensive and staff are kept fully informed. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning has taken

place but has been less systematic; appropriate plans are in hand to make the procedure more robust. The curriculum development team has carefully tracked the progress made and has been extremely focused on meeting deadlines. The self evaluation was of a very good quality; it gave a clear statement of the actions taken with easy access to the evidence and has given an overall evaluation of the impact. It clearly identifies key priorities for development and is realistic in its assessment of progress made.

The chair of governors provides strong and effective leadership. The governing body works well with the school to implement the action plan and monitor progress. Governors are clear about their roles and responsibilities in holding the school to account. They are kept well informed, for example, about the teaching and learning and the impact of this on the pupils' achievement.

The LEA has provided good support; this has included a varied range of contributions. These have been well received and the school is positive that the impact has been good. The input by the geography adviser has been particularly useful in enabling the school to develop generic systems for other foundation subjects. The attached advisor regularly visits the school. His reports and the LEA reviews have been helpful in tracking progress and identifying future actions; they set a challenging agenda. The LEA intends to continue supporting the school at its present levels during the next academic year. It has been helpful in supporting the headteacher on his return to school.

The school is making good progress towards raising pupils' attainment and eliminating underachievement.

In relation to the action plan and the impact of the actions taken, good progress has been made in addressing the key tasks which relate to the school's underachievement.

The school needs to continue to implement and further embed the challenging agenda it has produced to eradicate all elements of underachievement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of governors and the County Education Officer for Hampshire. This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

ADELA BAIRD
HM Inspector of Schools

cc chair of governors
LEA