

A CASE STUDY OF IMPROVEMENT IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL

At the time of the inspection, the school was found to be satisfactory overall, but with some important weaknesses in self-evaluation. The school did not know itself well and, as a result, the findings from the inspection were less positive than most staff were expecting. On the whole, staff had difficulty in accepting the findings and were unclear about how to improve. Both deputy headteachers left their posts. The headteacher remained in post.

The Education Authority (EA) took strong and supportive action following the inspection. It deployed a quality improvement officer to work with the senior leadership team and staff. HMIE continued to engage with the school and EA to support on-going improvement and monitor progress. The district inspector met with the headteacher and senior EA representatives to discuss the inspection findings and advise on strategies for improvement. The headteacher was, at that stage, unable to come to terms with the inspection findings and unwilling to see where improvements were needed.

The EA continued with focused support to the school. It supported staff to visit other schools to observe good practice and provided focused development activities to ensure that staff had the necessary training to help them to improve. The EA also supported the school to evaluate its work. Staff began to see where they had made improvements and there was a better understanding in the school about what needed to get better. The district inspector visited the school to talk with the senior management team and to visit classes. Staff were asked to volunteer to have a short visit and this process helped them see the original inspection in a more positive light.

Eighteen months later, the headteacher and staff had accepted the findings at the original inspection and had realised, through reflection and working with EA staff, what needed to be improved. There had been significant changes to staffing and the headteacher had found that the new staff group were keen to improve the school's provision and ensure high quality experiences for learners. There was a renewed enthusiasm and determination amongst staff, who were keen to demonstrate their new skills.

By the time of the HMIE follow-through inspection staff were very positive and proud of their achievements. The school had made good progress in each of the main points for action, notably in improving leadership and the quality of learning. Staff reported that dialogue with inspectors, EA officers and among themselves had supported their work and encouraged them to continue to improve. HMIE did not need to carry out any further visits in connection with the original inspection.

A CASE STUDY OF IMPROVEMENT IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL

At the time of the original inspection, the school was found to have important weaknesses in most aspects of its work including ethos, pupils' learning experiences, attainment and leadership, and major weaknesses in self-evaluation. The education authority took immediate action following the original inspection to support the school to improve.

Following the inspection, the education authority provided considerable additional support to the school to improve the way in which self-evaluation and improvement were carried out. Quality Improvement Officers worked closely with the headteacher, senior management team, departments and staff to support them in making the school better. HMIE continued to engage with the school and education authority to support improvement and monitor progress. The district inspector met education authority representatives and senior promoted staff in the school to discuss and advise on the way forward. The headteacher worked with staff to improve morale following negative reports in the local media and to encourage staff to work together more and discuss their teaching practice.

After a year the school's ethos had improved and staff were working better as a team. Staff had begun to improve learning and teaching and they were more involved in making decisions about the work of the school. The school had improved the way in which its work was monitored and evaluated, although the new systems were at an early stage of development. There was a need for further work to ensure impact on learners. After a further year, the school had regained the confidence of most staff and a significant number of parents who had removed their children from the school were happy for them to return. The education authority improved aspects of the building which enhanced the learning environment. Staff monitored the quality of learning more effectively, and the school's plans for improvement were more systematic. Inspectors were able to indicate that they would not undertake any further inspection visits in connection with the original inspection. The headteacher and staff reported that the original inspection and subsequent support work from the education authority and HMIE were real catalysts for change in the school. Many teachers had taken successful steps to improve their practice. The ethos of the school and behaviour of learners had changed significantly. Leadership had improved and this had resulted in improvements in outcomes for young people.