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20 September 2013

Mrs Jane Ireland
The Acting Headteacher
Marshlands Primary School
Marshfoot Lane
Hailsham
East Sussex
BN27 2PH

Dear Mrs Ireland

Special measures monitoring inspection of Marshlands Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 and 19 September 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2012. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2012

- By following the other improvement recommendations below, and as a matter of urgency, raise pupils' attainment in English and mathematics so that:
 - the school meets at least the floor standard for pupils' progress
 - standards in Key Stages 1 and 2 rise considerably and quickly
 - pupils in all year groups regularly meet challenging milestones, working towards these overall targets to overcome the current backlog of underachievement.

- Improve teaching significantly, so that it is consistently good and better by:
 - raising considerably the expectations of staff about what pupils can and should achieve
 - ensuring teachers set challenging tasks for pupils, based on assessments of their needs and precisely what they need to learn next
 - ensuring teachers use good questioning of pupils consistently to enhance and draw out their thinking
 - making whole class teaching sharper so that pupils spend less time listening to the teacher and more time engaging in demanding tasks
 - using staff performance management more robustly to hold teachers to account and support them in targeting and bringing about improvement
 - ensuring that pupils have consistent, well organised opportunities to read widely.

- Sharpen considerably school self-evaluation so that, in particular, the quality of teaching is robustly and accurately evaluated, and that the school is clear about how well all pupils are progressing as individuals and groups.

- Ensure the effectiveness of the school improvement planning by:
 - identifying clear targets and milestones for pupils' progress and attainment, for all cohorts and groups
 - including within the plan actions which are designed to achieve the milestones and show how these actions are rigorously and regularly monitored and evaluated
 - ensuring that the pupil premium funding is carefully targeted and that the impact of this expenditure on outcomes for the pupils concerned is robustly checked.

- Improve quickly and radically the leadership, management and governance by:
 - ensuring senior leaders clearly and consistently raise expectations amongst the staff and demonstrate the skills needed to bring about improvement
 - providing support and challenge for staff as needed
 - planning strategically and evaluating the school's work and its impact very

- carefully
- allowing middle leaders to take more responsibility for the provision and standards in their areas, being clear about what is expected of them and ensuring they are well supported and held accountable for the impact of their work
 - immediately undertaking a review of governance and ensure that governors have high expectations of the school, can hold school leaders properly to account and show the skills necessary to undertake the tasks of governance.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 18 and 19 September 2013

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, acting deputy headteacher, Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative of the local authority. English and mathematics lessons were observed in almost all classes, most of them jointly with a senior leader. The Nursery and Reception classes were also observed. The visit examined all areas for improvement. Pupils' achievement in writing received particular attention.

Context

The school continues to be led by an acting headteacher with ongoing support from a consultant headteacher. An acting deputy headteacher started in June 2013, on a one-year secondment from another school. The interim executive board is continuing to explore options for the school to become a sponsored academy.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement is not accelerating as strongly as it needs to in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers' assessments were not confirmed as accurate until mid-May 2013. Senior leaders have set challenging targets, based on these assessments, but the school is behind where it should be given the eleven months that have passed since the section 5 inspection. The next two terms, between now and the end of December, will be a crucial period for the school to show that pupils are making accelerated progress. Attainment at Year 6 declined considerably in 2013 with less than a fifth of pupils reaching, or exceeding, the expected Level 4 in the three key areas of reading, writing and mathematics. These pupils left the school poorly prepared for their secondary education.

At the time of the last monitoring inspection, the acting headteacher identified that the school's approach to teaching phonics (the sounds that letters and combination of letters make) was not working. This was borne out by the poor results in the national 2013 phonics check, both for pupils in Year 1 and those in Year 2 who did not reach the expected standard last year and who were reassessed. Many pupils in Key Stage 2 still have gaps in their phonic knowledge and cannot spell words that they should know accurately. Senior leaders have brought in several new ideas, this term, to improve phonics teaching and to raise the profile of reading with both pupils and parents. These new initiatives are at an early stage. It is therefore too soon to see signs of any impact on pupils' early reading and writing skills.

Around ten different additional programmes have been running over recent months, to support individuals or small groups who need to catch up in reading, writing

and/or mathematics. Some of these have been substantial, spanning several months. These programmes have not had enough impact on pupils' progress.

Across both key stages, pupils have two books that they use for writing. In most cases, the books that pupils write in every Friday contain a better standard of work than their everyday writing books. Not all teachers expect enough of pupils when they write on a daily basis. Writing since the beginning of September is showing better progress in Years 5 and 6 where the new teachers in both classes are expecting more of their pupils. It is still early days, but the signs are that pupils' achievement in writing is beginning to pick up in these classes. This is an improvement since the last visit.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving and becoming more consistent. Pupils are clearer about what they are learning but not enough teaching is good to fill the gaps in pupils' learning quickly and to raise attainment. Although teachers adapt work for different ability groups, their plans are not based closely enough on the information from the May and July assessments to guide pupils' next steps. This was the key reason why some lessons on this visit were judged to require improvement rather than be judged good. Teachers are committed to setting high expectations for pupils but, in striving to challenge them, the planned work is sometimes too hard and some pupils struggle. In contrast, more able pupils are not always given challenging enough work. In one writing lesson, a group of more able pupils were capable of writing much more than the teacher expected, according to their assessments from July. They wrote very little, finished the task early and were not given further work.

Children in Nursery and Reception have settled in well at this early stage in the term. Children are already becoming familiar with the Early Years Foundation Stage routines and are given a broad range of experiences to support their early learning and development.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils continue to settle to their work quickly and maintain their concentration. They show a willingness to work hard and try their best. When asked to talk to a partner to share ideas, they leap to this straight away. Attendance is not improving as quickly as it needs to and remains too low.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

It is only from this term that the senior leaders have been in a position to set challenging targets for pupils, based on assessments that are reliable. This is later than it should be, with the school almost a year on from being judged to require special measures. Processes are now in place to check the progress of individual pupils as well as analyse the progress of different groups, such as those pupils supported by additional funding and those who receive additional support.

The consultant headteacher has improved the way the school collates information on pupils' attainment and progress. The formats being used are much clearer than at the time of the last visit. Helpful reports are now provided for the interim executive board. The Chair of the Interim Executive Board continues to ensure that the board provides strong, professional challenge for the school's leaders. The Chair asks incisive questions about pupils' progress and the quality of teaching, both crucial to the school's improvement.

The acting headteacher provides clear support and challenge, especially when weaknesses in teaching are identified. The sharp focus on teaching is making a difference and has led to an improvement in the quality of teaching since the last visit. The accuracy of senior leaders' evaluation is much more accurate than at the time of the section 5 inspection. The acting headteacher's judgements matched those of the inspector for all lessons observed jointly. The acting deputy headteacher has not had as much experience of monitoring lessons in this way and is at an earlier stage in developing her skills in this respect. The many support programmes, when pupils often work individually or in small groups, have not been rigorously monitored to make sure they are working as they should.

After the last visit, the consultant headteacher responded swiftly and developed a new strategic improvement plan for the school. This is clearly focused and much more specific than the previous version, produced soon after the school was judged to require special measures. Importantly, the plan is used frequently, by the senior leaders, to drive improvement, check progress and make adjustments where necessary.

External support

The school remains highly dependent upon external support. Since the last monitoring inspection, the local authority has facilitated the secondment of the acting deputy headteacher to strengthen the school's leadership. The linked adviser has supported the acting headteacher in monitoring lessons to check that judgements on the quality of teaching are accurate. Moderating judgements in this way has been helpful. Since the last visit, the school has continued to receive a lot of support from a range of consultants. However, the programme of support is still having too little impact on improving pupils' achievement in English and mathematics. The local authority has recognised that its support has not led to swift enough improvement. It has recently taken the decision to withdraw its consultants from the school in favour of a programme of support from a commercial company. This new programme of support is in the very early stages of being implemented.