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27 January 2014

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

Dear Mrs Ireland

Special measures monitoring inspection of Marshlands Primary School

Following my visit to your school, on 23 and 24 January 2014, 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 taken which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 fourth monitoring inspection on 23 and 24 January 2014

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting headteacher, consultant headteacher, acting deputy headteacher, Chair of the Interim Executive Board, two members of staff, a group of pupils and a representative from the local authority. The visit explored all areas for improvement, with a particular focus on mathematics.

Context

The school continues to be led by an acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, with support from a consultant headteacher. All three contracts extend to the end of the summer term 2014. The interim executive board is continuing to plan for the school to become a sponsored academy from September 2014.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The pupils' rate of progress in reading, writing and mathematics has picked up considerably since the last monitoring inspection. The school is no longer behind where it should be and is now demonstrating the improvements that would be expected by the fourth monitoring visit.

Leaders have been resolute and effective in focusing sharply on improving pupils' progress and, crucially, the quality of teaching. A lot has been accomplished since the last visit. At that time, challenging targets had been set for pupils, to make sure they caught up with their learning, but it was too soon to see convincing impact. Analysis of pupils' progress from September to December 2013 now shows an encouraging picture, in reading, writing and mathematics, with evidence of strongly accelerating progress in most year groups.

Based on the December assessments, pupils in Year 6 are likely to leave the school with much better results than those who left in 2013. There are early signs that their attainment could be much nearer to the national average this year in reading and mathematics. The same applies for pupils in Year 2. The school's focus on improving writing is continuing. Despite pupils' progress in writing clearly picking up, there is still further to go in all year groups before attainment approaches average.

Around three quarters of pupils in the school benefit from additional government funding (pupil premium). These pupils are also starting to make much better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The impact of the additional help is being closely monitored by leaders, and a good example of effective intervention work was seen during this visit. Clear writing targets had been set for a pupil who was having a one-to-one session with an adult. The pupil knew precisely what these

were and what had to be achieved in the session and worked hard to rise to the challenge and achieve success.

Pupils are becoming more aware of how their individual targets can help them achieve the next step in their reading, writing or mathematics. Pupils in Year 1 use their reading targets each lesson, for example, and decide how well they have achieved their target when the lesson finishes. Several older pupils recounted how they had learned several new 'strategies' for working out addition, since September, and used correct terminology when explaining what they meant.

While all these signs are clearly promising, they must be considered with a degree of caution. It is still relatively early days and it is vital that pupils' improved progress is sustained and built upon over the coming months, to counter the underachievement that has been a feature of past years.

The quality of teaching

There has been significant improvement in the quality of teaching since the last monitoring inspection. More good teaching was seen on this visit compared to the last one and several lessons were outstanding. Teachers' plans are now much more closely based on pupils' assessments. The teachers are more mindful of their pupils' targets, the gaps in their learning, and where each pupil needs to be by the end of this year. They are more involved in reviewing pupils' learning themselves and making the finer adjustments that are necessary to encourage good progress over time. Almost all teachers were planning work at the right level for their pupils' differing abilities and needs. They kept a careful eye on how well pupils were managing, as the lesson progressed, and were quick to change their approach if they needed to. This more fluid, responsive type of teaching has been rare on past visits but is starting to become more the norm.

In all successful mathematics lessons, the more able pupils were tackling challenging work that was making them think. In Year 2, for example, they were asked to put a series of three-digit numbers into a sequence. Once accomplished, they quickly moved on to a set of four-digit numbers and then made the decision themselves to move on to even bigger numbers. The task was planned in a sufficiently open-ended way to allow them to do this. In Year 6, a group of pupils who were capable of doing harder work on percentages were given more complex problems to solve from the start and the teacher promptly moved their learning on further, once they had shown they were able to cope. Learning faltered for all groups in one mathematics lesson. The weaknesses lay in the quality of the teacher's planning, when all pupils were doing the same task, which was inappropriately pitched for most pupils. This left some confused and uncertain and others keen to go faster.

The way teachers use questions to support and encourage learning has shown clear improvement. Teachers are drawing on a wider range of questioning techniques

than previously, adapting them for different situations. Several good examples were seen in mathematics lessons when both teachers and teaching assistants were asking well-crafted questions to draw out pupils' thinking, for example, or to clarify pupils' understanding when they had not quite grasped a concept. Similarly in a Year 1 reading lesson, both adults questioned pupils skilfully to help pupils glean information from non-fiction texts.

Nursery provision was not observed on this monitoring inspection. Children in Reception continue to benefit from a rich variety of well-planned activities, both indoor and outside. The children who started in January are already settling well and becoming familiar with the routines and expectations in Reception. The children's achievements are reviewed day by day and the teacher's plans adapted accordingly. This fine-tuning is helping children to learn and develop successfully across the different areas of learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are continuing to show commitment in lessons and a willingness to try their best. In all lessons, pupils settled to work quickly and organised themselves well. Pupils who met with the inspector said that they were being expected to work much harder than in the past. They were clearly pleased to be doing so. One pupil seemed to sum up the general feeling of the group by reporting, 'When I walk in the school gate, I think: yes! work!'

The acting headteacher has continued to focus on improving attendance. There are pertinent reminders around the school and on the website to encourage better attendance. It is starting to show improvement and the number of pupils with poor attendance is falling. There is still some way to go with both measures, however, before they come into line with the figures for primary schools nationally.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders have responded well to the findings of the last visit and concentrated on improving the aspects that needed particular focus. The improvement plan has been targeted effectively at the most important priorities and has been reviewed regularly to check how well the school is progressing. There is certainly a sense in which the school has turned a corner in improving its effectiveness. The interim executive board has continued to provide a strong steer in this respect. Its members knew, at the last visit, that the school needed to demonstrate its impact in supporting the pupils who benefit from the pupil premium. It was too soon at that point to analyse the effect of this extra support. The evidence is now pointing to a positive picture, although more work is needed to analyse the impact of the different support programmes that are in place to find out which are working well and which are not.

The acting headteacher, with the support of the consultant headteacher and the interim executive board, has been resolute and focused in improving teaching. The acting headteacher has not shied away from any challenges in her drive to improve teaching and learning. The acting deputy headteacher is beginning to develop her expertise and confidence in monitoring the quality of teaching. This aspect has shown some improvement since the last visit, with the focus shifting from what the teacher is doing to how well pupils are learning in lessons observed.

The interim executive board is ensuring that plans for academy status are managed appropriately. In making plans for the transition period, the need to sustain the school's continued improvement is, rightly, at the forefront of any decisions.

External support

The local authority is monitoring the school's progress rigorously through the interim executive board. At the time of the last visit, a commercial company had been brought in, by the local authority, to provide a programme of coaching for teachers. The leadership team has worked successfully with the consultants from this company to make sure that the coaching has been appropriately focused and, therefore, beneficial for each teacher. Teachers report they have found the programme helpful and supportive. It has had a clear impact on the improving quality of teaching.