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1 November 2007

Mrs K Bye
Marshlands Primary School
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Dear Mrs Bye

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF MARSHLANDS
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Barry Wood, Additional Inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 October 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, and the Corporate Director of Children's Services for East Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Browning
Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF MARSHLANDS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 17 and 18 October 2007

Evidence

Inspectors observed eleven lessons, scrutinised documents and looked at pupils' work. Inspectors met with the acting headteacher, the temporary assistant headteachers and the teachers responsible for literacy, numeracy and science. Inspectors also met with groups of pupils, the chair of governors and other governors, representatives from the local authority (LA), the school development advisor and the site manager.

Context

Temporary leadership and management arrangements have continued since the last monitoring visit and there have been some significant staff changes. Two newly appointed and temporary assistant headteachers have taken over the roles of deputy headteacher, Key Stage leaders and of the coordinator for special educational needs (Senco), as these members of staff have left. In addition, two Key Stage 1 teachers, five teaching assistants and the school secretary have also left and new appointments have been made. The senior leadership team has been extended to include a Foundation Stage manager. The management intervention board is still in place, though governors are expected to take back control in November 2007.

The staffing was restructured in June 2007 because of falling rolls and to expand the leadership team. The school is now reorganised in to five mixed-age classes, with a nursery that takes children in the mornings only. The Foundation Stage and classes 4 and 5 are located in temporary accommodation while significant building works are taking place. Additional temporary support staff have been employed to ensure pupils with statements of educational need receive their entitlement.

Achievement and standards

Since the last monitoring visit the school has had more accurate data with which to evaluate pupils' achievement. This information highlights pupils' erratic progress within and across year groups and in different subjects, with no clear trend of improvement. Assessment data also illustrates the impact of changes of teacher experienced by many pupils and the adverse effects of a few pupils with challenging behaviour on the achievement of the majority. Pupils in the current Years 2 and 5 require substantial support to lift their achievement because of these factors.

Although there have been some small improvements, standards remain exceptionally low at Years 2 and 6. The most recent national test results highlight the continued variation in progress and standards so that, while results in some subjects improved, in others they remained static or declined. Pupils make better progress in reading and writing than in mathematics. There was some improvement in Year 2 tests in reading and writing, for example, as there was in English results at Year 6. This picture reflects the greater confidence of staff in teaching literacy skills and the

longer period of external support received from the LA. The picture is more mixed for mathematics, as last summer's test results in this subject fell at Year 6 and remained exceptionally low at Year 2. Few pupils reached the higher levels in English and mathematics.

The school is working hard to tackle the huge legacy of underachievement. Support and intervention programmes have been restarted and these are now matched well to pupils' needs. More experienced staff have been redeployed so that those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive suitable support. However, these improvements are too recent to have had any marked effect academically. Detailed analysis of pupils' performance in national tests has pinpointed those areas where pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Nevertheless, despite such improvements, significant numbers of pupils still underachieve and their progress remains inadequate. The school acknowledges that pupils' attainment and achievement are not yet good enough, especially in writing throughout the school and in mathematics in Years 3 to 6, and that standards remain too low. In English, there are weaknesses in composition, pupils' ability to organise their writing effectively, and in extracting and sequencing information. In mathematics, measure, shape, space, capacity, data, fractions and solving problems in real-life situations are amongst the weaknesses identified. These shortcomings are to be found in pupils' work and are evident in lessons.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- Raise the standards and achievement in reading, writing and mathematics in Years 1 to 6 – inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

More opportunities for pupils to develop independent learning skills in lessons are helping to raise their self-esteem and confidence. Relationships are strong and pupils say they trust teachers and adults. Their behaviour has improved and continues to improve because teachers are helping pupils to manage and improve their personal and social skills. Pupils have also been involved in developing the new behaviour policy. Incidents of poor behaviour are fewer and less intense. Exclusions have reduced and behaviour in the classroom is no longer a significant barrier to pupils' learning. Indeed, by Years 5 and 6, pupils' behaviour is generally good.

The school is trying hard to promote the importance of good attendance and good systems and procedures have been developed. Staff are committed to improving attendance and are using outside agencies effectively. However, despite these endeavours, low attendance is a major factor in the poor progress of many pupils.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- Improve pupils' attendance by implementing more rigorous procedures for raising attendance – satisfactory.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved. Better use of assessment information and the greater involvement of pupils in setting targets for their learning in English and mathematics is leading to more focused teaching and improved support for pupils. In just over a third of lessons the teaching was good or better, with none being inadequate. There now needs to be more good teaching and learning to help pupils make up lost ground. All teachers use whiteboards effectively, and this makes learning more interesting. Good teaching featured rigorous planning, well-targeted support, tasks that were well matched to pupils' needs, and good expectations for both pupils' behaviour and work. These lessons showed teachers' greater confidence and expertise in handling incidents of poor behaviour, so they have reduced in number. Praise is used well to raise pupils' self-esteem and the use of 'talking partners' improves pupils' speaking and social skills. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. In most lessons, the teachers shared with pupils what they were expected to learn and whether or not this had been achieved by the end of the lesson. This and the use of 'thumbs up' helped the teachers to understand how well pupils had achieved and to develop the next steps for learning.

Where teaching is satisfactory, work tends to be targeted at average levels and does not lift pupils' expectations sufficiently to close the gaps in their learning. For example, in some lessons the tasks were not varied enough for pupils of different abilities, and not sufficiently challenging for more-able pupils. Teaching assistants were generally used effectively both for support in class and for work away from the class room with small, focused groups. The tendency for some teaching assistants to intervene and correct work without the pupils' involvement can reduce pupils' independence.

All teachers are successfully using the new rigorous tracking system. This means that pupils at risk of underachieving are identified earlier. Good intervention and support programmes are in place to help them. Target setting is now based on accurate information. This improvement, combined with regular meetings between class teachers and senior leaders to review pupils' progress, ensures that teachers are well informed about what pupils are capable of and are more accountable. Though not yet consistent, this approach is leading to greater sustainability.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- Improve the quality of teaching and eliminate unsatisfactory teaching by improving assessment and ensuring work is well matched to pupils' needs – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Leadership is good and is significantly improved. Parents and staff are noticing the improvements; as one parent commented, 'This is a new Marshlands school.' The headteacher has a strong and inspirational vision for the school and her high expectations are uncompromising. Her good communication skills have led to a stronger understanding of the school's future direction and for the need to maintain a sharp focus on raising standards. She has developed a strong team spirit in a short

time and in the difficult circumstances which result from the renovation of the school building. She is empowering all staff and governors to take responsibility and be accountable for their performance. The temporary assistant headteachers have moved swiftly to bring about major developments in special educational needs, assessment, teaching and the greater involvement of parents. Middle managers are clear about their roles and responsibilities, especially in monitoring standards, teaching and learning in their subjects. Their enthusiasm for the task is having a significant impact on classroom practice. Nonetheless, these improvements have not yet had time to influence academic performance.

The school's improvement is founded on good systems and procedures. Self-evaluation is accurate and involves more staff and governors. Development planning, including subject and local authority action plans, is central to moving the school forward and improvement is monitored frequently and well. The school's performance is monitored on many levels by staff and by the local authority.

The governing body is developing its expertise and analytical skills. Governors are increasingly asking challenging questions about the school's performance. They have ensured that the school's policies are in good order and that all statutory requirements are met. They are well positioned to accept devolved power from the management intervention board.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in November 2006:

- Improve school leaders' ability to bring about improvement, and the systems for monitoring and evaluating pupils' achievement – good.

External support

The local authority continues to give the school good support. The school development advisor and the literacy and numeracy consultants provide strong and valuable support. Training has been well received by all staff and work has been undertaken to develop the role of coordinators, and to support the school with its improvement planning.

Priorities for further development

- Increase the proportion of good teaching so as to close the gaps in English and mathematics and raise pupils' standards and achievement.