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26 March 2008

Mrs Y Ashraf
The Acting Headteacher
Marshlands Primary School
Marshfoot Lane
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Dear Mrs Ashraf

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

Following my visit with David Collard, Additional Inspector, to your school on 11 and 12 March 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third 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 third monitoring inspection: 11 and 12 March 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the acting headteacher, and acting assistant headteacher, and the teachers responsible for literacy, numeracy and science. Inspectors also met groups of pupils, the chair of governors and several other governors, representatives from the local authority (LA), and the school development advisor.

Context

Temporary leadership and management arrangements have further changed since the last monitoring visit in October 2007. The new acting headteacher and new acting assistant headteacher were appointed in January 2008. One of the two teachers who shares the teaching of Year 2 is new to the school and there has been some staffing turbulence in Years 5 and 6. The school has appointed a substantive headteacher who is due to start in April 2008. A new chair of governors has also been appointed. The school's building programme has just been completed.

Achievement and standards

Standards in Years 2 and 6 remain exceptionally low with very few pupils on track to reach the higher levels. The improved assessment systems mean that teachers now have an accurate view of pupils' achievement. The school's roll continues to fall and, to take account of significant changes in the school's population in Years 2 and 6, the targets set for 2008 in literacy and numeracy were lowered. The revised targets are appropriate, but very modest when compared with those set for schools nationally. Evidence from this inspection and information held by the school indicate that these modest targets are unlikely to be met. Over Key Stage 2, the achievement of the pupils in Years 5 and 6 has been poor and is still too slow. The current disruption to teaching in these year groups has hindered their progress further. Additionally, these pupils have been most affected by the legacy of underachievement as they moved up through the school. The picture in Years 1 to 4 is mixed, with pockets of underachievement by a significant number of pupils. Progress seen in lessons was in the main satisfactory. Nevertheless, pupils' work over time and school tracking data confirm that achievement is still inconsistent. This is evident across year groups, including in Year 2, and in reading, writing and mathematics. There has been no sustained trend of improvement since the previous monitoring visit of October 2007.

Some stronger elements in teaching are resulting in some small signs of improvement in pupils' skills in speaking and listening, reading and basic mathematics. Improving writing skills remains an ongoing challenge for the school. There are still significant gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding, and teaching is not consistently good enough to accelerate pupils' progress. The continued turnover of teaching staff is a further barrier to pupils' learning. Those

pupils who do not attend regularly make inadequate progress, as do the most able. This is because the work set is not always challenging enough to meet the needs of more able pupils.

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

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

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour is satisfactory overall and this is an improvement. Teachers consistently use the well established methods for positive behaviour management. This has resulted in better behaviour across the school and there has been a further reduction in exclusions. Children say, 'We lose less learning time now because the naughty children know they have to behave.' Incentives to behave well are central and pupils say they enjoy earning merits and prizes. Teachers, pupils and governors report that the school is a much calmer place. Improved play space and resources, training of supervisory staff, and the pupils' involvement as 'buddies' and peer mediators have all contributed to calmer and more enjoyable playtimes. In lessons, most pupils are more able to work collaboratively or independently without constant adult support. Pupils told inspectors of their increased enjoyment of school and said, 'We get to do more exciting things now.' They increasingly understand the importance of how to lead safe and healthy lives and described how they knew too much alcohol was a bad thing because in science they had dipped a pig's liver in alcohol and it had shrivelled up.

Attendance remains a concern for the school. Despite good procedures, put in place since the last monitoring visit, attendance figures have continued to fall and are well below average. The school is working closely with a number of parents as well as celebrating good attendance in assemblies and through their 'Attendance Challenge'. External agencies are making efforts to follow up the most persistent cases of absences, although the school would appreciate greater support in this area.

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

- improve pupils' attendance by implementing more rigorous procedures for raising attendance – inadequate.

Quality of provision

Teaching is improving and there is a small amount of good teaching. One inadequate lesson was seen during this inspection. Generally, planning supports greater consistency and the common format used requires the teachers to consider different tasks or activities for different abilities of pupils. However, more able pupils are not sufficiently challenged. Work is not always pitched at the right level to match pupils' needs and abilities and does not take account of the gaps in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills, which means their rate of progress slows down. Staff have been very well supported and trained to use the relatively new procedures to check pupils' achievement. As a result, they are much more confident in using this

information to set learning targets for pupils and they are fully aware that they are accountable for pupils' achievement. The focus on teaching and learning has established 'non-negotiables' such as ensuring work is dated, has a title and states the lesson's objective for learning. These good features are evident in all lessons. Nonetheless, the presentation of work is too often untidy and this is not picked up on sufficiently in teachers' marking. Otherwise, marking usually reflects the school's policy. Helpful comments point pupils in the right direction in how to improve their work, but there is scope to make these more specific to move pupils on. Managing the pupils' behaviour has improved significantly so that less learning time is lost due to disruption. The school has good access to outside agencies. Teaching assistants are much more focused in supporting pupils' learning needs. These factors, together with the recent review of provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have meant the quality of provision, intervention and support is more specific and better matched to pupils' needs.

The new learning environment has made a substantial difference to pupils' learning. Pupils are enjoying the new building, and staff have worked hard to make classrooms stimulating and well organised. The quality of displays in the school is greatly enhanced. For instance, the display about Ancient Egypt celebrates pupils' achievement and has stimulated much interest amongst pupils. Displays of pupils' targets for reading, writing and numeracy are prominent in every classroom. Although older pupils know their targets and understand what they need to do to reach them, younger pupils are less certain of them.

The school has had significant support from the local authority to coach teachers in best practice and help develop the roles of middle managers. With the constant changes in staff this is ongoing. The school's monitoring shows that teaching is generally satisfactory and the proportion of good teaching is increasing. The quality of teaching overall is still not consistently good enough to bring standards up to the required level.

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

The many changes at leadership level, ongoing disruption caused by staff turnover, and the recent significant building refurbishments have made continuous school improvement difficult. Nevertheless, the acting headteacher has continued to build on the good systems that were put in place before her arrival. She has successfully handled the moves following building works and has led the way in developing an attractive learning environment. This in turn has led to a far calmer atmosphere around the school. Attractive displays are being used more readily by teachers as learning prompts, although there is, as yet, very little of the pupils' own work to be seen. A good start has been made in analysing assessment data following mid-year testing of all pupils. This has identified that there are still many pockets of underachievement. However, this is all too early to have had enough impact on

pupils' progress. The acting assistant headteacher has evaluated the procedures for identifying and supporting pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is now a more accurate picture of the many complex difficulties and more specific guidance and support are being provided. The evaluation has highlighted the need to seek statements of special educational need for more pupils and this is in the process of being undertaken. The very strong support from consultants has meant that the middle managers' role is developing well. The managers are becoming more confident in their own judgments because they have better information to help them evaluate their areas of responsibility. This is helping them develop more realistic action plans. However, with the many recent changes, follow-up work to determine how successful they have been is less rigorous. The governing body is now playing a stronger part in the leadership of the school. The governors were actively involved in the appointment of the new substantive headteacher. Following extensive guidance and support, and with the expertise of new governors, they are more capable and are beginning to gain confidence in offering challenge.

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 – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has continued to provide the school with a significant level of consultancy support which has helped senior leaders, middle managers and teachers. It continues to provide a good level of challenge. This has contributed directly to the improvements seen in day-to-day teaching, specifically in literacy, numeracy and science and in the use of assessment data. A review of special needs provision has taken place and there has been a significant impact on improving governance.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure teachers are clear about the gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills so that they can create learning activities that move pupils learning on at a faster rate.