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Mrs D Wakelin
Headteacher
Meeching Valley Primary School
Valley Road
Newhaven
BN9 9UT

Dear Mrs Wakelin

Special measures monitoring inspection of Meeching Valley Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 and 20 June 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 March 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.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Browning
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Ensure that teaching promotes pupils' achievement well by:
 - developing teachers' understanding of the teaching of phonics
 - developing an effective whole-school approach to the teaching of spelling, punctuation and handwriting
 - ensuring that there is a clear analysis of gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding, and that this information is used to match tasks and support in lessons to meet pupils' needs
 - providing success criteria so that pupils' progress can be assessed accurately at a range of levels
 - giving pupils more opportunities to write at length in a range of subjects
 - ensuring that introductions to lessons encourage pupils to develop the skills to work independently and are not overlong
 - ensuring teachers' questioning is challenging and probes pupils' understanding.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at senior, governor and middle management level by:
 - developing leadership capacity to give teachers the support they need to improve their skills
 - improving the use of data so that pupils' progress is monitored accurately and the information used to ensure that individual needs are met
 - increasing the involvement of the governing body in strategic planning in order to improve its role in raising pupils' attainment.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 19 and 20 June 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Chair of the Governing Body, the headteacher, the executive headteacher, senior and middle leaders, and a representative from the local authority. The inspector held discussions with pupils and a small group of parents and carers. The inspector observed nine part lessons all of which were jointly observed with the headteacher and senior and/or middle leaders.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection the school roll has increased slightly from 183 to 185. An additional teaching assistant has been appointed to the school. The building work to improve the outside provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage has been completed. The school has been asked to by the local authority to take additional children in the Early Years Foundation Stage; this means that the school will run two classes on entry to the school from September 2013. The local authority is extending the contract with the executive headteacher until July 2013.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's checks on pupils' progress show encouraging signs that pupils' achievement is beginning to accelerate with a greater proportion now making expected progress and for a small proportion, progress is better than expected. Nonetheless, pupils' attainment remains below the national average. Inspection evidence indicates that their progress is variable and inconsistent. For example, while gaps between English and mathematics are generally closing, pupils in different year groups do not always make the progress of which they are capable. This is evident in lessons and especially in pupils' books which demonstrate that there is inconsistent progress and learning over time that relates strongly to differences in teaching quality.

Senior leaders are using a range of different ways to accelerate pupils' progress, including small-group teaching and different intervention groups, many of which are having a positive impact. The progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is improving quickly because of continued well-focused support by trained staff. Close monitoring checks ensure that the different programmes used are having sufficient impact and value for money. The gap in attainment for pupils receiving additional government funding (known as pupil premium) and their peers in both English and mathematics is narrowing, but not as fast as found nationally. A small breakfast/nurture group ensures that children eligible for pupil premium funding have a good start to their learning. Booster sessions, support and

interventions are also used effectively to reduce gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Pupils can also take tablet computers home to support their learning. Pupils say they enjoy reading, the Maths week challenge and Word of the week, because as one pupil said, 'It makes us think.'

Pupils have more opportunities to write, and at length, but this has further exposed weaknesses in their spelling, punctuation and handwriting. Pupils are not applying their phonics knowledge (linking letters and sounds) to everyday writing. Too often teachers accept work that is untidy, incomplete or not of a good standard. The school has revised its policy on improving pupils' handwriting and has introduced 10 minute bursts at the start of English lessons but this is too recent to see any impact. Pupils enjoy applying their mathematical problem-solving skills especially in Years 5 and 6 for example, when working out puzzles and deciphering Captain Smuggles' codes as part of their project on pirates.

The quality of teaching

Teaching quality remains mixed, with some that is high quality, but too much that requires improvement to move pupils on at a faster pace. Teachers and other staff generally work hard to try to bring improvement, but the quality of teaching can still vary considerably even from lesson to lesson in the same class. This variability explains why pupils' progress is inconsistent. Where teaching has not been good enough, substantial support and mentoring have been provided and where necessary, teachers have been held to account. When supported effectively, the quality improves, but in some cases when support is reduced, teaching quality loses momentum and is not sustained. Pupils' books also show what teaching is typically like over time and are a good indicator of pupils' on-going progress; in some classes they confirmed teachers' low expectations. Marking and feedback have improved and there are a few instances of pupils responding to teachers' comments. Marking in English is still more informative than it is in mathematics.

The local authority has helped teachers to improve lesson planning. All lessons have clear learning objectives that are shared with pupils. Planning provides a good structure for learning and tasks are usually adapted to match pupils' individual needs. Teachers use lolly sticks with pupils' names to randomly ask them questions in order to check their understanding. Teachers use resources such as interactive whiteboards and short video clips to make learning more interesting, the use of peer discussions (where pupils talk in pairs about their learning) reinforce learning. In classes where teaching is less effective, there is a slow pace to learning, too much 'teacher-talk', and pupils are overly dependent on teachers' guidance on what to do, leaving too little time for pupils to write at length. While preparation for writing is often good, pupils are slow to write, their spelling is weak and presentation untidy.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils say they feel safe and there are few instances of bullying. They say when it occurs it is usually down to a handful of known pupils and is quickly dealt with. A few parents and carers expressed concerns about pupils' behaviour at the start of the day, in lessons and at playtimes. Behaviour during the monitoring visit was good and pupils assured the inspector that it was typical. Any incidents of poor behaviour are thoroughly logged and records show that school procedures are followed. Those with complex behavioural needs, though supported, find managing their behaviour difficult at times and this, say children, can disrupt learning and spill out into the playground. Attendance is improving as school leaders take firm actions with non-attenders. There is good support from external agencies to address poor attendance and parental involvement has increased.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders are acutely aware, as is the local authority, that teachers' expectations need to be consistently higher to move pupils' progress at a faster rate. At the moment it is too variable. The support from the executive headteacher and her school has been invaluable in terms of sharing best practice from checking pupils' work to supporting middle leaders in their roles. Middle leaders have a much clearer view of pupils' progress and attainment and they check teachers' planning, teaching and pupils' work. They are developing their skills and seek best practice. All have received support from the local authority and some from independent consultants. The special educational needs coordinator has a sharp insight into pupils' needs and with leaders she ensures that the programmes used to support pupils are suitable.

The revised school improvement plan rightly focuses more on improving pupils' outcomes. Leaders hold termly pupil progress reviews with each teacher to discuss individual pupils' progress and these are followed up to check that any extra support pupils receive is working well. Arrangements for checking on the work of staff performance management are robust and teachers are held to account about the progress their pupils make. Judgements on teaching observed with leaders during the visit were closely matched with those of the inspector. The learning environment for reception children is much improved. The curriculum is more interesting with visits, such as to the Sea Life Centre and a Years 5 and 6 residential trip, which enhance learning. Work on developing the curriculum continues and displays reflect the greater focus on writing and developing pupils' mathematical skills, creativity and imagination.

Governors work strategically with leaders to ensure the school is promoting improvements. They ask probing questions, linked to the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Governors understand the school's performance information and make good use of it to challenge and hold leaders to account. They recognise the urgency of eradicating weaker teaching that requires improvement so that the

school can improve at a quicker pace. The school meets the requirements for safeguarding.

External support

The local authority continues to support the school and the monitoring by the local authority is helping the school to better assess its effectiveness in improving pupils' achievement. Strong school partnerships continue to make a positive difference although the executive headteacher is stepping back slightly as the capacity of the headteacher, senior and middle leaders grows. Staff at the partner school support teaching improvements well through peer observation, mentoring and the writing of lesson plans. Good support has been provided to strengthen the capacity of subject leaders, especially in English and mathematics.