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Mr R Turney  
The Headteacher  
Cornfield School  
Cornfield Close  
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West Sussex  
BN17 6HY

Dear Mr Turney

#### SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF CORNFIELD SCHOOL

Following my visit with Peter Isherwood, Additional Inspector, to your school on 1 and 2 October 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2007. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – inadequate.

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 Director of Children and Young People's Services for West Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Mike Kell  
Additional Inspector

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF CORNFIELD SCHOOL

Report from the first monitoring inspection: 1 and 2 October 2007

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the pupils, the seconded headteacher, other members of the school's leadership team, and the English leader. Discussions were also held with the chair of governors, the local authority's general adviser (special educational needs/special schools) and the school improvement partner.

### Context

The interim management arrangements that were in place at the time of the last inspection remain as the substantive headteacher is still on long term sick leave. The seconded headteacher shares his time between Cornfield and his own school. There have been significant changes in personnel. One of the assistant headteachers, who taught English and was on long-term absence when the school was last inspected, has now left, as has the advanced skills science teacher. In response to this, the seconded headteacher has temporarily restructured the school's leadership team. The senior team consists of the headteacher, a newly established head of school (previously the other assistant headteacher) who has responsibility for the school's day-to-day running, and a new member of staff with responsibility for assessment and recording procedures and for monitoring behaviour. The extended leadership team includes two curriculum leaders; one has the additional role of special educational needs coordinator and the other manages day-to-day behaviour support. The school is now fully staffed apart from one teaching assistant post, and the governing body is up to strength.

### Achievement and standards

The students do not make the progress that they should, especially in English and mathematics, during the time that they spend at Cornfield. This is because of inadequacies in teaching and ineffective procedures for assessing, guiding and supporting students' learning.

Despite the efforts of the school's leaders and the local authority, the provision for mathematics has not developed since the last inspection. Teaching is still inadequate and students do not learn sufficiently well or make enough progress. Their achievement remains inadequate. The provision for English has improved, but there has not been sufficient time for the changes to have had a positive impact on progress. The staffing difficulty has been resolved and the students confirm that they enjoy the subject. Good progress has been made in giving the students feedback that helps them to improve the quality of their work. However, teaching is not yet as

fully effective as it could be because more rapid learning is sometimes prevented by the students' behaviour. Students are able to get away with unacceptable behaviour because the teacher is not being mentored and supported sufficiently well in applying the strategies that are required to manage the behaviour of students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Despite the teacher's inexperience in working with students with learning difficulties, there are reasons to be optimistic about this subject's future development.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2007:

- raise students' achievement, especially in English and mathematics, by ensuring that these subjects are taught well – inadequate.

### Personal development and well-being

The students' behaviour continues to be unsatisfactory. There are classroom rules, which the students know, but in practice many choose not to follow them. The students confirm that disturbances arise because work is not pitched at the right level and so they lose interest and their behaviour deteriorates accordingly. Many students' lack of interest is evident in the high number that does not go to school. Attendance is exceptionally low; so far this term it is only 76%.

### Quality of provision

While some lessons are taught well, inconsistent practice means that the overall quality of teaching and learning remains inadequate. In particular, not all teachers have the expertise to manage the students' behaviour effectively. Teachers do not respond consistently when the students break classroom rules because they do not follow a clearly established protocol. Staff intervene at different points and in different ways. Therefore, the students do not receive a consistent message about what constitutes inappropriate behaviour and what are the consequences of continuing to misbehave. As a result, low-level disturbance in too many lessons hinders students' learning. In addition, all too often the low-level disturbance is not dealt with effectively and the situation escalates. The students' behaviour then becomes far more challenging and they are sent out of classrooms, and this often requires the help of the on-call behaviour support staff.

When lessons are taught well, such as in history and information and communication technology (ICT), teachers are clear about what they expect their students to learn in the session. The students understand these expected outcomes and teachers maintain a good pace and provide a good variety of activities that challenge the students and maintain their interest. At these times the students work productively and behave well. However, in other lessons, such as mathematics and science, the level of work provided is not always appropriate, being either too hard or too easy, and the students become uninterested.

The failure to ensure that learning activities match the students' needs stems from shortcomings in planning and assessment procedures. Overall, teachers do not plan precisely what it is that they want individuals, or groups of students, to learn. In part, this is because the school's practice does not require them to plan in this way, but the problem is more deep-seated and complex than this. It is rooted in the fact that teachers do not have a good enough understanding of what their students have already achieved and so they are not able to use this information when planning learning programmes. The school has developed a system for determining the National Curriculum (NC) level for each student in English, mathematics, science and ICT. It has also set two targets for all students in each of these subjects for the end of their current key stage, that is, at the end of either Year 9 or 11. One target is the NC level that the student is expected to attain and the other is a more challenging and aspirational one. However, there are some serious flaws in the procedure that reduce its usefulness and impact. Staff have limited experience in judging NC levels and so many students' levels are insecure. Consequently, the progress that many are expected to make, or are judged to have made, is unrealistic. In addition, the targets have not been scrutinised by the school's leaders and there are a number of discrepancies that have not been picked up and pursued. Finally, the school has not yet considered how it is going to evaluate students' ongoing progress, for instance at the end of each term, in order to show them what they have achieved to date and how this fits into the long-term target that is some way in the future.

The school produces individual education plans (IEPs) as part of its procedures for guiding and supporting its students. The local authority's statement of action indicated that all students would have an updated IEP by the end of April 2007. This target has not been met. Very few IEPs have been rewritten and students' targets in those that have been updated are not reflected in lesson planning.

The school has responded well to ensuring that girls receive equal opportunities. They are not disadvantaged by the curriculum or lesson content. In addition, the school has taken positive steps to better meet their particular needs. It quickly set up a Girls' Group, with a designated member of staff, which meets regularly and provides a variety of interesting activities, ranging from make up to street dancing. The girls have been involved in reviewing the group's activities and planning for the future. They were very positive and came up with interesting ideas for future events, such as a visit from the police liaison officer to consider safety issues.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2007:

- ensure that girls are given opportunities to succeed in a range of activities which closely matches their needs and aspirations – good
- help students to achieve more by involving them in setting and evaluating their own more precise and challenging targets – inadequate.

## Leadership and management

The governors and local authority have not been able to make progress towards establishing a permanent and sustainable leadership team and will not be able to do so until the position of the substantive headteacher has been resolved. This is hampering the school's ability to make progress in this area for improvement. Whilst acknowledging that the more permanent solution is largely outside the school's control, the temporary measures that have been introduced are not proving effective. The current school leaders are generally inexperienced and they are not leading or managing the school effectively. They have not made sufficient progress in establishing the practices that are required to make the improvements needed to address the issues from the previous inspection. The school is some way short of having the capacity to improve without continuing external support.

The seconded headteacher has produced a school improvement plan aimed at improving the quality of education and raising standards, but it is not proving effective. This is due to inadequacies in both leadership and management. Whilst the seconded headteacher is working hard to lead by example and to establish a firm strategic direction, the senior staff as a group are not demonstrating the same leadership through their own actions, clear vision and determination to move the school forward. Nor are they establishing a culture that has the highest expectation of students' academic work and behaviour. Management systems are not wholly effective. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the school's practice do not identify shortcomings and target support to those areas where it is needed most. Hence, some staff struggle to manage the students' behaviour, lesson plans have glaring omissions, and assessment procedures are inefficient.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in March 2007:

- ensure that a viable leadership team is installed to achieve the school's aims through a rigorously evaluated improvement plan – inadequate.

## External support

The local authority has funded a high level of additional support. Visitors to the school have included subject advisers, consultant headteachers, advisers in data analysis and behaviour management, and the school improvement partner. Although the level of support has been high, it has not had any significant impact on moving the school forward. The school improvement partner agrees that improvements are behind schedule and that much of the problem is related to leaders spending too much time on managing day-to-day events.

The local authority clearly recognised that the rate of improvement was not good enough, but has not responded to this as well as it should have done. At a formal review of its statement of action just prior to this monitoring inspection, it made significant strategic changes to its plan even though the chair of governors had been told this would not be the case and, therefore, did not attend. In addition, the

seconded headteacher did not know the extent of some of the changes that had been made. The revised statement of action has pushed back some target dates by as much as twelve months rather than considering better ways to make the improvements needed. The plan also shows that the date for removing the school from special measures has been put back from July 2008 to September 2008. The changes to the statement of action reflect the local authority's uncertainty about the viability of its original proposals and they have some significant implications. The target dates are now not challenging enough and they are unlikely to lead to the removal of special measures in the desired timescale. The chances of this happening are reduced even further by the fact that there is now a serious lack of harmony between the school improvement plan and the local authority's statement of action. This is causing confusion and is clouding the need to implement more effective strategies and actions as a matter of some urgency.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Implement a consistent approach to behaviour management and ensure that all students understand the consequences of misbehaviour.
- Write lesson plans that identify clearly the subject-specific skills, knowledge and understanding that individual students or groups are expected to learn and provide activities that meet more closely the learning needs of each pupil.
- Ensure that the students' baseline attainment levels are accurate, that their targets are realistic, and that there are mechanisms in place for measuring and recording the progress that students make.