

6 June 2008

Mr Stephen Hanscombe  
Headteacher  
Mill Hill Community Primary School  
Crosby Road  
Northallerton  
North Yorkshire  
DL6 1AE

Dear Mr Hanscombe

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF MILL HILL  
COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Following my visit with Lesley Clark, Additional Inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 June 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 May 2007. 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 be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Wilson  
Lead Inspector

## SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF MILL HILL COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report from the third monitoring inspection: 4 and 5 June 2008

### Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with key staff, including the headteacher and deputy, groups of pupils, a sample of parents, the chair of governors and representatives from the local authority (LA).

### Context

Since the previous visit a newly elected chair has begun to lead the governing body. Vacancies exist for one community and two parent governors. The school is still experiencing financial difficulties but agreed restructuring of the staff for September 2008 should resolve the deficit budget.

### Achievement and standards

Evidence from assessment data shows that standards are beginning to improve, though there is a long way to go to make up for previous underachievement. In particular, the more able pupils are not reaching the standards of which they are readily capable. However, there are distinct signs, especially in English, of faster progress. This is because the improved marking of pupils' work indicates more precisely what pupils have done well and what they need to do next. Pupils' writing reflects their attempts to improve on previous work so they can achieve their targets. More effective guided reading sessions are helping pupils to read with greater understanding, though opportunities are missed in some lessons to reinforce basic reading skills. This slows the progress of the less able pupils as they do not learn new words by seeing them pointed out as someone else reads. Teaching assistants are underused in this respect. Pupils' understanding of which strategy to adopt to solve basic number problems is still insecure and this slows their progress in mathematics. Through the use of more investigative approaches to learning in science, pupils have a clearer understanding of scientific concepts and are thus making better progress. However, in all three core subjects, pupils' ability to remember what they have learnt is weak.

The progress pupils make varies across the school, especially in the Foundation Stage, where children sometimes make insufficient progress. Where children are less challenged by the learning activities provided by the teacher, and not allowed to choose their own, they make much less progress. When this happens they miss out on becoming curious, confident learners at this early stage. This has repercussions in later years, especially in terms of pupils' confidence to learn independently without adult support. The school's tracking information shows a marked improvement in some pupils' progress in Year 2. This is because they are being taught well and the more able pupils are challenged by specific work which makes them think. However, these pupils still need to catch up on some very basic skills. In Years 3 to 5,

satisfactory progress is being made in raising the standards pupils reach. The school's recent assessment data show pupils making better progress in Year 6. This is because of a more systematic approach to enabling pupils to reach the levels expected of them by the end of the year. Overall, the progress made by the more able pupils is still relatively slow because they are not always challenged, or able to work with sufficient independence.

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

- Raise achievement and standards in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory

### Personal development and well-being

The improving personal development and well-being of the pupils is reflected in their more positive attitudes towards school, the pride they have in their work and in their attendance. Pupils' punctuality to school has improved as a result of the better systems for recording and dealing with lateness. Most pupils enjoy school and are learning how to keep healthy and safe; however, they feel let down by the poor state of the toilets. As a result of the new behaviour code, pupils are much clearer about the consequences of unacceptable conduct. Pupils remark how behaviour in lessons has improved because of this.

### Quality of provision

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning has improved since the monitoring visit in December 2007. The leadership team has worked hard to develop a consistent approach to teaching. Most teachers are clearer as to what constitutes an effective lesson. They plan their lessons with a better idea of what most pupils should be able to do and this is resulting in better learning. However, whilst teachers understand the need to provide greater challenge for the more able pupils, their actions to do so are inconsistent. The strong lead for improvement in teaching and learning through sharing good practice and paired support for teachers is succeeding. Pupils are less passive and take more responsibility for their learning. In some classes, however, this is at an early stage.

In the better lessons group work by pupils is developing well, for example, through the use of 'talking partners'. In these lessons the teacher's use of questioning is improving, but it is not good enough to challenge the most able. In the weaker lessons there is often too much talking by the teacher when introducing the activity and opportunities are missed for pupils to take responsibility for their learning. In these lessons teachers are concentrating more on teaching and not sufficiently on how much the pupils are learning. The support by teaching assistants is too often focused on helping the teacher rather than improving learning. Some assistants are insufficiently skilled to assist pupils to learn well enough.

Pupils are clear about their targets and how well they are doing in literacy and numeracy. Targets are being developed in science but are not yet in place for all classes. Although there are some inconsistencies, teachers generally make clear in

their marking how well pupils are doing and what they have to do to improve. This system of marking is raising pupils' progress in writing. The use of 'Big Books' has helped learning in science and pupils speak well of how they are more involved in experiments. Improvements are also being made in the use of information and communication technology (ICT). The school is keen to develop further the links with parents to help pupils improve their learning, though the provision of homework across the year groups remains variable.

Improvements to the curriculum are focusing on the development of skills and the use of the locality to provide relevance and interest. This is still at an early stage, though recent lesson planning shows that subjects are beginning to be linked creatively together. In consequence, pupils show more interest and better attitudes to work. Physical education lessons now take place regularly and pupils' concentration levels and fitness are improving as a result. The leadership team is using the curriculum effectively as a vehicle for change and to provide a sharper focus on learning. For example, a recent multicultural week generated great interest amongst pupils, staff and parents, and its good influence can be seen in current lesson planning.

In the Foundation Stage an appropriate balance between teacher-directed and child-initiated activities has not yet been reached. Consequently, children are not always developing sufficiently as independent learners. Strengths include good relationships with children so they feel happy and settled and thoughtful questions help children understand new ideas. Some activities are not sufficiently well thought out to stimulate children's curiosity and challenge them to think for themselves and this slows their learning.

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

- Improve teaching, particularly by raising the level of challenge, especially for the more able pupils – satisfactory

### Leadership and management

The strong, effective leadership and management of the headteacher and his deputy headteacher have contributed very well to the progress made by the school. Within a very short period they have secured a clear vision for improvement which is shared across the school. They have a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and are committed to ensuring its long-term success. There is a strong focus on the key priorities that will overcome the legacy of previous weaknesses and improve pupils' standards and raise achievement. Parents appreciate the stability and openness the new leadership has brought and the school is working to involve parents as partners in their child's learning. Monitoring systems are becoming more established. A clear school development plan focuses not only on the long-term but also on the short-term actions needed and is used well to evaluate the progress the school is making.

Leadership by the subject leaders of English, mathematics and science is improving well. There is increasing accountability through more effective monitoring of teachers' and pupils' performance. Leadership of ICT is also developing, though it is too early to see the effect. The headteacher has recognised the need to improve the leadership of the other subjects and is piloting innovative approaches to ensure the quality of this leadership. The professional development of staff is seen as crucial. The school has correctly identified that the skills of teaching assistants need to be improved and that support for the Foundation Stage should continue. There are very clear minimum expectations of staff to ensure high quality professional standards and good role models for pupils. However, whilst interesting displays of pupils' work make the school environment more appealing, there is not a welcoming reception area to make parents feel at ease and convey such professional expectations.

The newly elected chair of governors has quickly established herself as a well respected, critical friend of the school determined on improvement. Governor training has continued and some governors are developing better skills in monitoring and evaluation. However, for a few, greater accountability for school improvement is needed, along with a better understanding of their role as a governor, as not all are best suited to their current positions. Some governors are developing a better understanding of what goes on in the classroom. However, more work is still needed in this area, as there is in building better relations with parents.

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

- Ensure long-term stability in leadership and management in order to provide a secure foundation for improvement – good

#### External support

The school continues to benefit from strong support from the LA through the work of the school improvement partner and specialist advisers. The effect of this is seen in the continued progress made by the school. Consequently, the school is clear where work is still needed and how to improve. The school and LA have rightly identified that continued support is needed, for example, in the Foundation Stage and in the development of the leadership and provision of ICT.

#### Priorities for further improvement

The key issues identified in the inspection in May 2007 remain the priorities for improvement.