

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs Holden  
Headteacher  
Snapewood Primary  
Aspen Road  
Bulwell  
Nottingham  
Nottinghamshire  
NG6 7DS

Dear Mrs Holden

**Ofsted survey inspection programme – schools formerly in special measures now judged to be good or better**

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Mark Sims HMI on 25 September to look at work done to improve the school's overall effectiveness since it was placed in special measures in September 2002.

As outlined in my initial letter, the visit focused on the successful actions taken by the school to build capacity and significantly improve provision, particularly in relation to: the impact of external support; the involvement of pupils and parents in school improvement; issues around staffing and leadership and management.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the outcomes of the visit included interviews with the headteacher, senior staff, teachers, groups of pupils, a representative of the local authority and representatives of the governing body including the chair of governors. Other relevant documentation was scrutinised.

Immediately after the designation of special measures in 2002 the headteacher resigned. The local authority responded speedily to support the governing body by identifying an experienced acting headteacher who had been successful in similar circumstances. He adopted an authoritative leadership style which was highly directive and crucial in order to stabilise the school, and to identify and secure short-term priorities. His strong presence in

and around the school very quickly gained the confidence of staff, children and parents. Pupil behaviour which was judged to be unsatisfactory during the inspection was very quickly transformed through policy development, close monitoring and a higher profile on rewards. The impact was to create a sense of calm within the school community. Pupils responded positively to new opportunities to shape improvements through the school council. Around this time priority was given to changing the open plan design of the building to create discrete learning areas. Displays enriched the learning environment demonstrating value in pupils work.

Expectations were raised for staff and pupils and a non-negotiable agenda set for addressing the eight key issues which covered all aspects of the school's work. This led to some staff changes as individuals chose to move on. An experienced teacher joined to increase the school's capacity for improvement. The new team recognised the need for improvement and were supportive of the direction provided by the acting headteacher. Resources were identified to be inadequate to support the delivery of the national curriculum and immediate steps were taken to address this, despite the school's deficit budget.

With local authority support a range of initiatives were introduced to strengthen provision and the expertise of staff. Assessment and tracking systems were established to identify more effectively the areas needing attention such as underachieving boys, and the development of writing. Local authority consultants and advisors provided input on literacy, numeracy, ICT and SEN to support planning. The new headteacher recognised that the curriculum was not best suited to the needs of all pupils. This led to a stronger cross curricular approach to literacy and the introduction of more creative and exciting activities. The impact was to improve attendance, attitudes to learning and motivation which strengthened the school's ethos. The local authority advisor supported the acting headteacher in establishing systems of monitoring and evaluation which extended to classroom observation, work scrutiny and feedback from children. The legacy of inconsistent teaching and learning led to a decline in standards during this period although progress on other key issues was identified during HMI monitoring visits.

Improvements were acknowledged by parents and gradually barriers were reduced through increased contact at the gate, and communications home. Parent volunteers joined school staff to complete mini projects such as creating a mural on the gym walls, and constructing a Japanese garden. This strengthened relationships with staff and led to increased involvement within the school, and a full complement of parents on the governing body. The governing body was strengthened by two experienced governors assigned by the local authority. Training and modelling by the local authority increased the confidence of governors to meet their responsibilities by challenging the school appropriately. The strength of the governing body was demonstrated during the selection process for a permanent headteacher one year after the school came out of special measures. They were determined to secure the

right candidate who would build on the school's progress. The local authority link advisor provided continuity and valuable support during the transition period.

The new headteacher appointed in September 2005 accurately evaluated the school's stage of development. She provided strong leadership characterised by a collaborative style which empowered staff to increase the pace of progress. Actions taken led to an overall effectiveness judgement of good in the school's last inspection in July 2006.

The new headteacher recognised the need to embed the good practice gained from previous training to secure consistency across the school. Crucial to this was the strengthening of assessment and tracking systems in order to direct intervention. She led a relentless focus on raising standards and accelerating progress. Effective training led to a more sophisticated and refined approach to planning to ensure that teaching and learning was linked firmly to the effective use of learning objectives, and layered targets. Management systems were rationalised to secure an explicit improvement cycle.

With effective review and evaluation, and feedback from pupils further improvements were made to the curriculum. A themed approach integrating key skills and creative activities has been extended to keep learning relevant and engaging.

The collaborative approach to school improvement has led to a strong team spirit and a culture of consultation across staff, pupils, parents and governors. In this context leadership roles have grown, and planning shaped by the commitment and contribution of all staff. The headteacher has raised the profile of continuous professional development across the school. Individual programmes for teaching and support staff have been skilfully developed to enhance skills and expertise. This approach has strengthened the school's capacity for further improvement and facilitated progression both within and beyond the school.

Pupils enjoy the vibrant learning environment which supports their learning. The display of work, key vocabulary, objectives and targets has raised expectations and aspirations. This is further enhanced by wall displays which demonstrate the development of standards in writing and problem solving from the foundation stage to Year 6. Pupils' express pride in their school and relish the opportunities provided to play their part, such as through the buddy scheme. Pupils enjoy and value the opportunity to have an open forum with the headteacher where they can freely express views on their school experiences. The partnership with parents has continued to grow with an increased involvement through informal contact at the breakfast club, or as helpers on school visits.

Governors have continued to improve the learning environment and resources available to support learning. Confidence and expertise have grown and they

are now able to talk openly about the school's strengths and areas to be developed further.

Together the strategies adopted by the school have led to an upturn in standards in 2007. The overall effectiveness of the school's leadership is further endorsed through the national Healthy School and Artsmark awards. Morale is high. The school provides outreach support to other schools and is identified as a best practice school within the local authority.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop in the school.

A copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

**Nada Trikić**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**