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25 January 2008

Mr R Turney
The Headteacher
Cornfield School
Cornfield Close
Littlehampton
West Sussex
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Dear Mr Turney

**SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING INSPECTION OF CORNFIELD SCHOOL,
LITTLEHAMPTON**

Following my visit with Paul Canham, Additional Inspector, to your school on 15 and 16 January 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second 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 – 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 Director of Children and Young People's Services for West Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Mike Kell
Additional Inspector

SPECIAL MEASURES: MONITORING OF CORNFIELD SCHOOL, LITTLEHAMPTON

Report from the second monitoring inspection: 15 and 16 January 2008

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, examined documents and students' work, and met with groups of students, the seconded headteacher and other members of the leadership team. Discussions were also held with the chair of governors and the local authority lead adviser for the school.

Context

There have been changes in the management of the school since the first monitoring visit. The substantive headteacher has left and this has allowed the position of the seconded headteacher to be formalised. He has been appointed executive headteacher of the two schools, his own and Cornfield. This is on a fixed-term contract for a maximum of two years in order to allow Cornfield's governors to plan for the appointment of a new substantive headteacher. The senior leadership team is unchanged, but the extended leadership team now includes just one additional member of staff, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO). The school is fully staffed except for mathematics. This teacher left the school at the end of 2007, but a replacement has not yet been appointed and so this subject is taught by an agency supply teacher.

Achievement and standards

The newly implemented strategies for improving the students' behaviour and the sharper focus on raising the quality of teaching and learning are beginning to have an impact on the rate of progress made by the majority of students. The school is better placed to evaluate students' progress because staff are more skilled at setting targets and evaluating students' achievements, and the systems for monitoring this have been refined. Students confirm that they know their National Curriculum level targets in each subject, which provides further motivation for them to achieve. Staff analyse students' achievements in order to check the extent to which they are on track to meet their targets. Although this analysis looks promising, it is too early to make definitive statements about the impact that the new strategies and procedures are having on accelerating students' progress. However, there are signs that senior leaders' analysis of assessment data is effective in other ways. For instance, the leaders have identified a small group of Key Stage 3 students who would benefit from carefully targeted, personalised support with literacy, although they have not yet developed the provision that will enable this to take place.

The early indications are that most students make satisfactory progress in taking the small steps required to meet their longer term targets. However, there are notable exceptions. Although the attendance figure is disproportionately influenced by the poor attendance of a small number of students who absent themselves persistently, attendance remains low, particularly in Key Stage 4. The frequent absence of this

small group severely restricts their ability to build upon their learning from one lesson to the next and this limits their rate of progress. In addition, although they know the rules and the staff's expectations, there is a small group of students who behave unacceptably on too many occasions, despite teachers' implementation of the school's procedures. Consequently, these students are the ones who generally have to leave lessons and, therefore, lose learning time.

The provision for English continues to develop and students make satisfactory progress. They are given challenging and varied activities that maintain their interest and, with the support of the newly implemented procedures, teachers' increased confidence in managing students' behaviour results in less teaching time being lost. Provision for mathematics remains inadequate despite the efforts of the school and targeted input from the local authority. The students do not make the progress of which they are capable.

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 school has responded well to the priority for further improvement relating to students' behaviour that was set in the first monitoring visit. Recent staff training has been effective in establishing a consistent approach to managing behaviour. The students confirm that they like the new system because it is transparent, fair, all staff follow the procedures, and less time is wasted in lessons. They know exactly what to expect if they misbehave. Initially, this resulted in more students being sent from lessons and an increase in the number of fixed-term exclusions as students tested the school's commitment to carrying out what it said it would do. The situation has now stabilised, with signs of a downward trend in the frequency of both of these events as the students realise that inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated. Most respond well to this stricter regime. For instance, the number of students eligible for Golden Time (a choice of activities) each week has increased even though it has become more difficult to collect the number of tallies required to participate. However, there is still a feeling of fragility in some lessons, with the potential for disturbance bubbling under the surface because of the reluctance of a few students to comply with the behaviour code. The school now needs to move on to the next step and address this situation.

Quality of provision

The provision for the small number of girls continues to develop. The girls say that they feel comfortable in school and in no way intimidated as they are confident that they can approach several members of staff who they trust. They feel that the school atmosphere has improved in recent months as expectations of behaviour have become much clearer. Girls are not disadvantaged and the Girls' Group continues to provide additional opportunities for them to pursue activities of particular interest. The school has addressed this area for development effectively and so it will not feature on future monitoring visits.

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. This confirms the school's own monitoring and that carried out by external consultants and local authority staff. The improvement since the first monitoring visit has been driven by two changes in practice – the management of students' behaviour and the quality of lesson planning. Teachers' application of the behaviour management protocol has had a significant impact on reducing the amount of time lost in dealing with disruption. At the previous monitoring visit the school was asked to improve the focus and overall quality of lesson plans. Training has enabled staff to address this well. Plans now have a consistent format and a much sharper focus on learning. Consequently, activities more closely match students' capabilities and so students remain interested and work more productively.

The school has responded equally positively to the third priority for further improvement. The local authority has helped the school to become more efficient in the way in which it assesses students' learning and assigns a National Curriculum level to their work. Moderation exercises with staff from a local mainstream school have ensured that levels are more accurate and provide secure reference points against which targets can be set. The students have had the chance to look at these and have been encouraged to evaluate whether or not they are challenging, without being unattainable. By being involved in this way, students have the opportunity to negotiate possible alternative targets and this has been an influential factor in encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning. The students comment that they like this development and confirm that they now receive regular guidance from staff as to how they can improve their standard of work. Alongside these developments, the school has become efficient at recording the students' achievements and senior leaders are examining this data to evaluate their progress.

The school's rationale for writing individual education plans (IEPs) for all students is unclear. The IEPs have limited value because too many of the targets are imprecise and they are not referred to in teachers' planning. Currently, an IEP for every student does not represent an efficient use of resources, nor does it enhance the quality of learning. A more efficient and useful exercise would be to write IEPs only for the minority of pupils who are causing concern, either because of their behaviour or their slower academic progress, in order to target additional resources to where they are likely to have the most impact.

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 – satisfactory.

Leadership and management

The departure of the substantive headteacher was an important milestone in the evolution of the school because it signalled the fact that the interim leadership team was now fully responsible for driving improvement. The team responded positively and the first crucial step that leaders took was to recognise the seriousness and urgency of the situation. They have successfully engineered a change in culture and so staff are focused on moving forward rather than dwelling on the past. There is a

developing sense of direction and purpose as staff work towards a common aim, using procedures and guidelines in a consistent way. The school and local authority have restored clarity on the nature of the school improvement plan that is being used to direct change, and this is an important vehicle in maintaining focus. More robust and routine monitoring procedures provide senior leaders with information about the school and the leaders scrutinise this data to check how well the school is running.

Senior leaders have established a sound foundation for further development and there is emerging evidence that they evaluate the impact of their work in terms of how it is influencing outcomes for students, both academically and in promoting their personal development. However, this is still at an early stage and the team does not yet have the capacity for continuing improvement without the support of the local authority in verifying their judgements and in guiding their future work.

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 – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has maintained a high level of input, but this is now having more practical impact than at the time of the first monitoring visit. Both dimensions of the local authority's training and support are proving effective. Training, such as the Pivotal Education and Team Teach programmes, has had a significant impact on improving pupil/staff interactions and in establishing a calmer school. Monitoring visits from local authority advisers, consultants and the School Improvement Partner have been useful in keeping the leadership team focused and on track by drawing together their own and leaders' observations. It has been particularly beneficial for the leadership team to work with the local authority in examining this information to determine whether their actions have successfully raised students' achievements and enhanced their personal development.