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3 February 2011

Miss T Ruddle  
Executive Headteacher  
Timbertree Primary School  
Valley Road  
Cradley Heath  
B64 7LT

Dear Miss Ruddle

### **Special measures: monitoring inspection of Timbertree Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 1 and 2 February 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2010. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection are set out in the annex to this letter. 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 – good

Newly qualified teachers may not 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 the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Sandwell.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2010.**

- Improve the attainment of pupils across the school by:
  - making sure that all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make consistently good progress in all subjects
  - using the tracking systems to identify and provide additional support for underachieving pupils
  - setting targets for pupils which are based on previous performance and challenging them to raise their expectations.
  
- Increase the proportion of good teaching and learning across the school by making sure that all teachers:
  - use assessment information more effectively to inform their planning and teaching styles
  - match the level of work to the abilities of pupils
  - enable pupils to take more responsibility for their own learning
  - ensure that pupils know clearly how to improve their work and make good progress.
  
- Develop the quality and consistency of leadership and management at all levels across the school by:
  - ensuring that there is a shared vision and commitment from all staff for the continuous improvement of the school
  - developing the role of governors in their supporting and evaluating roles
  - developing the roles of middle leaders so that they are providing effective support for teachers and monitoring the quality of learning
  - reviewing the existing staffing structure so that there is a more effective and efficient use of resources.
  
- Improving attendance to be at least average with a focus on the few families who persistently do not send their children to school by:
  - using external agencies to support parents and carers
  - developing strategies to further improve the attendance of all pupils.
  
- Develop the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
  - ensuring that there is more focus on matching teaching strategies to children's needs including those with additional learning needs
  - developing a more rigorous and consistent system of measuring the progress of children so that assessment is integrated into the programmes of work

- increasing the effectiveness of the present leadership and management arrangements.

## **Special measures: monitoring of Timbertree Primary School**

### **Report from the second monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 February 2011**

#### **Evidence**

HMI observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, Chair of the Governing Body, members of the senior leadership team, groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority.

#### **Context**

When the school was judged to require special measures the local authority appointed a National Leader in Education to support the headteacher and instigated the formation of a hard federation with a very successful neighbouring school. The establishment of a new governing body in September 2010 accompanied this change in status. The headteacher of the supporting school was appointed to the post of executive headteacher of both schools on 1 September 2010.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, two teachers have left the school, including an assistant headteacher, and two teachers have joined, including a new deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher. At the time of the monitoring inspection two classes were taught by supply teachers because staff were absent from school.

#### **Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning**

Evidence from lesson observations across the school indicates that pupils' attitudes to and enjoyment of learning are improving. As a consequence, their progress is accelerating and the quality of their learning is becoming increasingly satisfactory, particularly in reading. In the current Years 2, 5 and 6 there is an increasing number of pupils who are making satisfactory progress and whose attainment is closer to that expected for their age. Nonetheless, the school recognises that pupils' attainment and achievement, including for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage remain too low.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the attainment of pupils across the school – good.

#### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

The school is generally calm and orderly. The vast majority of pupils behave sensibly around the school and are very courteous and friendly, both to adults and to each

other. There are a few examples of boisterous behaviour during break and lunchtimes but nothing that causes pupils to feel unsafe in school. The school has taken strong measures to tackle a preconception in the community that children do not need to attend regularly or come to school on time. The school is now taking a firm line on such practice. Consequently, the level of persistent absence is reducing and overall attendance is rising. Current attendance figures for this academic year are very encouraging and show an improvement on last year's figures. Such improvements all serve to contribute towards increasingly satisfactory learning in lessons.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve attendance to be at least average with a focus on the few families who persistently do not send their children to school – good.

### **The effectiveness of provision**

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the previous monitoring inspection. Considerably fewer lessons were judged inadequate, with an increasing proportion judged satisfactory or better, including one lesson that was outstanding. Relationships between adults and pupils, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage, are more positive and improving. Improvements in pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are primarily due to the positive impact of the new behaviour management strategies that have been implemented since the previous visit.

Teaching is generally satisfactorily planned. Procedures for supporting pupils, assessing their needs, monitoring their progress, and setting of academic targets for improvement are now more systematic. Regular meetings between teachers and the newly appointed inclusion manager are effective in promoting communication and sharing of information within the school. In addition, they strengthen links with a range of other agencies and sharpen the focus of their specialist input. Teachers have been greatly assisted by the much improved information that they have about the pupils in their classes. Consequently, support from teaching assistants is better informed and better organised. All of this is beginning to enable teachers to align their teaching more closely to the pupils' needs.

The quality of teachers' use of questioning has improved. In the best examples, teachers challenge pupils to provide extended answers and give them time for discussion. They also demonstrate how to compose a more detailed response. However, in other lessons, questions draw short answers and do not extend learning. Pupils make most rapid progress when lessons are lively and engaging but skilfully managed, with imaginative activities and when teachers use assessment information to define precise outcomes for each lesson.

Nonetheless, weaknesses in teaching highlighted previously persist. The most common limitations were in planning: when the intended learning outcomes lacked challenge, or when teachers had not considered how different pupils would learn.

Some teachers do not consistently strike the right balance between their own input and pupils working independently, and sometimes give pupils insufficient time to develop their ideas. In several weaker lessons, the pupils were expected to listen for too long and their consequent inattentiveness slowed the pace of learning. Teachers occasionally missed opportunities to extend and develop pupils' thinking, to ask for ideas or go beyond the work planned.

Pupils' writing is often very weak, and yet they are given too few opportunities or support to check their work for accuracy, look for basic errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar or use dictionaries to check the meaning of key vocabulary. Sometimes the impact of marking is ineffective because teachers do not correctly identify errors in pupils' writing. These shortcomings mean that the school is not consistently addressing the deep-seated weaknesses in some pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding and thereby beginning to raise standards.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- increase the proportion of good teaching and learning across the school – satisfactory.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The school is benefiting significantly from the executive headteacher's well-focused and determined leadership. Since the previous monitoring inspection, she has taken decisive and well-paced action to begin to remedy the widespread weaknesses identified by the section 5 report, the first monitoring inspection and her own accurate analysis. Staff have been made fully aware of the need for urgent improvement.

The school's action plan is tightly focused on the school's priorities. Some of the actions taken, such as, the appointment of a new staff and using members of staff from the executive headteacher's school to work alongside the teachers to help them build up their teaching skills, have had an immediate positive impact. Furthermore, because some staff have relinquished management roles to focus on improving their classroom practice, their confidence and effectiveness have grown, which is evident in the improved quality of teaching observed during the inspection.

Systems to monitor and track pupils' progress have been strengthened very considerably in Years 1 to 6. The executive leadership team is vigilant in monitoring and improving all outcomes for pupils and the leadership of teaching and learning is an improving strength. Evaluations of the quality of teaching are more rigorous and strengthen classroom practice because they feed directly into the continuing professional development programme, as well as providing teachers with specific points for improvement.

The school is building capacity within the ranks of middle managers to sustain and drive improvement. There are improved systems by which the senior staff support

and challenge the subject leaders to improve performance in their subjects. The recently appointed English and mathematics coordinators are making a growing contribution to bring about improvement to their subjects and generally play an increasingly effective role in monitoring aspects of teaching and learning. Leaders of these areas are beginning to understand what has improved and why, and have begun to prioritise the next steps they need to take.

The newly formed governing body is working effectively to challenge and support the school. Meetings are well planned, well led, and very thorough, with a clear focus on achievement and standards. Importantly, middle leaders are being invited to meetings to make presentations to the governing body. This is valuable both to hold these leaders to account and to inform the governors of improvements and key issues.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is improving slowly, albeit from a very low base. The accuracy of teaching specific skills such as the knowledge of letters and sounds (phonics) to promote early reading has improved. Teachers' planning shows a more appropriate balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities, providing opportunities for children to begin to develop their independence. Activities are better focused around the areas for learning, particularly in the classrooms, but they are not yet sufficiently tailored to meet the needs of individual children. There has been some improvement to the outside provision. The use of observation and assessment has improved but inconsistencies in assessment remain, particularly in securing an accurate baseline from which to judge children's progress.

The leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage is aware of the main areas for improvement, but the systems used for checking the quality of what is provided are not identifying the areas for improvement in enough detail, which limits the effectiveness of any plans drawn up to raise standards. The lack of a secure base from which to judge children's progress and too much teaching that is inadequate or only satisfactory are barriers to the rapid progress necessary to improve provision and the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- develop the quality and consistency of leadership and management at all levels across the school – good
- develop the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage – satisfactory.

### **External support**

The local authority has provided suitable support for the school. Its impact has been satisfactory overall. The local authority has set up suitable systems to monitor the impact of its own support and has conducted a review of the school's progress towards eradicating weaknesses in teaching and learning, altering support appropriately according to the school's needs.