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16 September 2010

Miss T Ruddle
Executive Headteacher
Timbertree Primary School
Valley Road
Cradley Heath
Sandwell
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Dear Miss Ruddle

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Timbertree Primary School

Following my visit with Mike Thompson to your school on 15 and 16 September 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2010. 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.

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



Special measures: monitoring of Timbertree Primary School

Report from the first monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 September 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, members of the senior leadership team including those seconded from the local authority, 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. This move was accompanied by the establishment of a new governing body in September 2010. The headteacher of the supporting school was appointed to the post of executive headteacher of both schools on 1 September 2010.

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

The progress that the pupils make is inadequate in too many lessons. This is because too many teachers are not getting to grips with assessing pupils' abilities and identifying gaps in learning in order to plan work that meets their needs.

Pupils' attitudes to their learning are negative and their enjoyment limited because there are too few practical or focused activities to encourage pupils to think about what they are learning. Opportunities to reflect on what they have learned and then understand how to improve are restricted. Pupils are often passive and do not engage with their teachers and this slows their progress. The tasks set are frequently mundane because teachers' expectations of the pupils' capabilities are too low. There is insufficient challenge for all groups of pupils. This is because teachers have a limited understanding of pupils' attainment at the end of each phase. Therefore, teachers are unable to match accurately the level of work set to the abilities of all pupils. Furthermore, the lack of clear and precise information about pupils' progress means that teachers are unable to pinpoint underachievement and intervene to eradicate it.

There has been a lack of effective moderation of standards in all year groups, but particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. For example, the school's own data for Key Stage 1 shows an apparent improvement in pupils' attainment in English and mathematics. However, an analysis of pupils' work shows that their attainment is much lower than their assessed levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Similarly, a scrutiny shows some inconsistencies in assessment, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where children's outcomes for



numbers as labels for counting are exceptionally low, yet their scores for calculating are high. This means there is no secure baseline from which to judge pupils' progress and the whole-school targets that are set are flawed.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

- improve the attainment of pupils across the school – **inadequate**.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Most pupils behave well and are keen to talk to visitors about their work. Relationships are positive and pupils clearly trust and respect the adults who work with them each day. Adults treat pupils sensitively and fairly. The attendance of pupils remains well below average because a number of pupils continue to be persistently absent from school. Action taken by staff and the education welfare officer is slowly leading to improvement amongst this group. Staff have begun to identify class and individual trends, but attendance is not routinely mapped against pupils' progress in order to investigate the effect of initiatives, especially for vulnerable pupils.

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 – **satisfactory**.

The effectiveness of provision

Around 80% of the lessons observed during the visit were inadequate and no good teaching was seen. This is a much weaker position than at the time of the inspection.

In the two satisfactory lessons observed, the work set was interesting and structured carefully so that pupils could succeed; consequently pupils made satisfactory progress. In the inadequate lessons, teachers failed to encourage pupils and spent too much time explaining the work to the pupils. As a result, the lessons were often dull, failed to generate a genuine interest or excitement in the activity, and pupils learnt little, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Here, there was not an appropriate balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities.

Lesson plan formats were consistent in most classes and were a useful guide to preparing timed activities within a three-part lesson. However, too often the plans described activities rather than charting the development of knowledge, skills and understanding. Most plans failed to identify exactly what the pupils were going to learn, how they were going to achieve it, and what they would be able to do to demonstrate that they had learned effectively. The activities set for pupils did not meet their needs, especially those of more able pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Planning failed to distinguish clearly enough



the precise level of work which individuals or small groups required to ensure they made adequate progress. Additionally, teachers are not assessing pupils' progress during lessons carefully enough to enable them to plan for the next steps in pupils' learning. Many teachers did not allow sufficient time for a meaningful review of learning at the end of the lesson. The teachers do not use teaching assistants effectively to support pupils' learning and fail to give them a clear direction. Too often, assistants sit passively while the teacher speaks to the whole class, and some are unwilling to take responsibility for small groups of pupils.

The quality of marking is too variable across classes, year groups and subjects. Occasionally, marking is good. Here teachers provide effective feedback that enables pupils to understand how they can improve their work and move to the next level. Most marking is cursory, rarely corrects inaccuracies in pupils' work, and does not help them understand what level they are working at. Sometimes praise is used inappropriately.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The executive headteacher and deputy headteacher are providing clear direction and beginning to move the school forward. They have a very clear appreciation of the school's current strengths and acknowledge the weaknesses that hinder efforts to raise attainment. They have taken steps in the very short time since their appointment to clarify and strengthen the roles and responsibilities of colleagues in senior leadership positions. The headteacher is clear that more needs to be done to strengthen leadership at senior and middle levels where a number of staff lack the leadership or classroom skills necessary to model or evaluate good practice as leaders of learning. The main reasons for this is that they do not focus precisely enough on pupils' learning, and are unable to make accurate judgments on progress based on the range of evidence available.

An understanding throughout the staff of their collective responsibilities is slowly emerging and an increasing proportion are now more committed to developing their own practice and to seeing the school succeed.

The school's action plan, written in April 2010, has some weaknesses. Appropriate success criteria are not provided for some of the areas requiring improvement. Nonetheless, a sharply focused analysis of the school's test results and a more rigorous and robust system to monitor the quality of teaching and learning mean the new leadership team is better placed to evaluate the school's progress.



The Early Years Foundation Stage team lacks a sufficiently developed knowledge of the early years curriculum and how children learn. Consequently, children receive a restricted curriculum with too few opportunities for outdoor learning. Activities provided do not ensure secure coverage of the six areas of learning, nor are they sufficiently well matched to individual children's abilities and their prior attainment. Children's starting points are not sufficiently well recorded to provide a firm basis for planning their learning.

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 – **satisfactory**
- develop the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage – **inadequate.**

External support

The statement of action produced by the local authority is appropriately focused with the school's key issues having been drawn into a coherent set of priorities. Local authority advisory staff have worked alongside teachers, providing valuable support that has been well received by the school. The school's progress has been appropriately monitored through task group meetings. However, opportunities for the local authority to gather direct evidence through whole-school reviews need to be more frequent in order to secure decisive intervention where progress is not good enough.