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29 June 2011

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

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Timbertree Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 28 and 29 June 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 third 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 – satisfactory.

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 third monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 June 2011

Evidence

HMI observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority. A number of joint lesson observations were completed with members of the senior leadership team.

Context

The school is part of a hard federation with a very successful neighbouring school. The headteacher of the supporting school is the executive headteacher of both schools. Since the previous monitoring inspection, two teachers have resigned and will be leaving at the end of the summer term and one teacher has joined the school. 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

Further gains in attainment and achievement have been made since the previous monitoring inspection as a result of improvements in the quality of teaching, leadership and management. The gap between the school's standards and national expectations has further improved. The proportion of pupils making two or more levels of progress has increased. Progress in developing writing skills is slower than in reading but there is a trend of improvement since the start of this academic year and challenging targets in Years 2, 5 and 6 have been met and, in some cases, exceeded.

Staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage have benefited from a good level of support provided by executive deputy headteacher. Consequently, practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage are increasingly better able to monitor children's progress. They are beginning to make adequate use of this information to plan activities for different abilities. As a consequence, children are now making broadly satisfactory progress. Pupils' progress between the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the end of Key Stage 1 is less secure, and pupils' attainment in Key Stage 1 remains well below average.

Progress in the lessons observed during the monitoring inspection was variable and was almost always directly related to the quality of the input from the teachers and the teaching assistants. Where the learning activities were well designed to move the pupils from the current stage in their learning to the next, the pupils made good progress. The improved provision for intervention strategies in withdrawal groups, including a sharper focus on the development of key skills for the pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, is an important step forward in improving the progress and raising attainment for all pupils.

Progress since the last inspection on the areas for improvement:

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

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school is satisfactory, and pupils are respectful and supportive of each other. Attendance has improved over the year and is now average. The family support leader maintains rigorous data which track pupils' attendance on a daily basis. Careful analysis pinpoints where there are attendance problems and the school follows up with telephone calls and letters to establish the reasons for absence.

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 profile of teaching quality is markedly different from that reported much earlier in the school's journey of improvement because the most effective teachers have successfully developed their classroom practice. There is evidence that teaching in Years 2, 5 and 6 is strengthening at a good pace. However, there remains too much weak teaching in the rest of the school. Pupils in these classes experience lessons of inconsistent quality that are sometimes satisfactory and, on other occasions, inadequate, although, considerably fewer lessons were judged inadequate, with an increasing proportion judged satisfactory or better. The rate of improvement to teaching and learning has slowed because of the difficulties the school has had in recruiting and retaining enough good teachers and leaders to drive the recommended improvements at the necessary pace to remove the school from special measures. Consequently, inadequate teaching has not been eradicated and is a barrier to future improvement.

A carefully targeted intervention programme, including individual tuition, is securing better progress. Pupils continue to make the most rapid progress when tasks are tailored to their individual needs and abilities, particularly pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities who now receive more effective guidance and support outside the classroom. However, the gains in their learning are not sufficiently well consolidated within lessons, particularly in mathematics. This is because much of the main teaching activity in class is aimed at the middle and higher-ability pupils. Therefore, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities needs are not always given the opportunity to participate fully in the main whole-class teaching session and their learning slows.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the focus on the quality of pupils' marked work and their knowledge of basic grammar, spelling and punctuation is having an increasing impact on how well pupils understand their current achievement and what they need to do to improve their performance. Nevertheless, the use of assessment is variable because it tends to mirror

the quality of teaching. The best lessons are underpinned by rigorous and regular assessments of the pupils' understanding and progress, and pupils know what they need to next because they understand their targets and are given very specific guidance in marking.

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 executive headteacher continues to communicate high expectations to staff about securing improvement and monitors rigorously the quality of teaching and learning. She has clarified procedures for monitoring provision and has strengthened self-evaluation. Capacity to sustain improvement in the long term is less fragile because the support from Corngreaves Primary School has resulted in gains in leadership and management at all levels. Initiatives are well targeted to deliver improvement within realistically defined target dates. Actions have been prioritised, taking into account both financial and personnel implications. The impact of actions to improve provision is closely analysed and discussed with staff and the governing body so that further strategies can be efficiently planned and implemented by all. Of particular note is work of the inclusion manager from the partner school, who has remedied many of the weaknesses in the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities; greatly improved systems and structures are now in place. She has a very good understanding of the need to ensure that gains in pupils' learning from intervention groups are consolidated in each and every lesson in order to accelerate pupils' progress.

The new staffing structure, which is intended to begin early next term, sensibly addresses the weaknesses in the of leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Nonetheless, systems to monitor and track children's progress have been strengthened very considerably in the Early Years Foundation Stage. There is now, clear and precise information about children's progress which means that leaders are better able to pinpoint underachievement and intervene to eradicate it. Early Years Foundation Stage staff have been trained to moderate the standards achieved so that judgements made about attainment and children's progress are now more secure. Nevertheless, the executive headteacher is aware that staff require further support with making accurate ongoing assessments of children's levels of attainment in order to plan activities that meet the children's needs and interests.

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 – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority provides appropriate support. The School Improvement Partner is providing an appropriate level of scrutiny to the school's work. Much support is being given by the partner school in the federation which has had a positive impact on the improved quality of teaching and assessment.