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9 February 2012

Mr M Sambrook  
Headteacher  
Townhill Junior School  
Benhams Road  
Townhill Park  
Southampton  
SO18 2NX

Dear Mr Sambrook

### **Special measures: monitoring inspection of Townhill Junior School**

Following my visit with Stephanie Matthews, additional inspector, to your school on 7 and 8 February 2012, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2011. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is 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

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed to any year group in the school.

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 Southampton.

Yours sincerely

Chris Nye  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2011**

- Ensure rapid improvement in pupils' learning and progress in reading, writing and mathematics, by:
  - improving teachers' understanding and accuracy of assessments to provide an accurate baseline for judging future learning and progress
  - setting challenging targets for individual pupils to promote good learning and progress
  - monitoring each pupil's progress in reading, writing and mathematics on a half-termly basis
  - implementing appropriate and effective intervention to support pupils identified as underachieving, or at risk of underachieving.
  
- Improve rapidly the quality of teaching in English and mathematics so that the large majority is good or better, by:
  - eradicating inadequate teaching
  - broadening the range of teaching strategies used by teachers to engage and motivate pupils
  - focusing more sharply on what specific groups need to learn in lessons, based on secure knowledge of pupils' attainment and their distinct targets
  - ensuring that pupils are clear about their learning in each lesson, what is expected of them and involved in assessing their own progress against their targets
  - increasing the effectiveness of learning support assistants so that they have a greater impact on pupils' learning.
  
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders, including the governing body, and build leaders' capacity to drive and sustain improvement, by:
  - strengthening the effectiveness and impact of monitoring and evaluation by senior and middle leaders
  - setting challenging targets for pupils in English and mathematics and ensuring that leaders and teachers can demonstrate how they are contributing to achieving these targets
  - ensuring that members of the governing body are clear about their roles and responsibilities in contributing to the school's strategic leadership and carry these out effectively.

## **Special measures: monitoring of Townhill Junior School**

### **Report from the first monitoring inspection on 7 and 8 February 2012**

#### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, and scrutinised documents, including tracking and assessment data, strategic plans and monitoring evidence. They met with the headteacher, pupils, staff, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative of the local authority. Teaching was observed in all classes and pupils' work was scrutinised.

#### **Context**

Since the previous inspection, the local authority has considered and rejected any immediate proposal to close the school. The governing body has been replaced with an Interim Executive Board. Staffing levels have remained stable, although one teacher retired in December and two other teachers, including the deputy headteacher, are currently away on long-term sick leave. The school is in the process of restructuring the senior leadership team to take account of these recent changes.

#### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

At the time of the previous inspection, pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 was low in English and mathematics, and their progress was inadequate. Since then, there has been a concerted effort to improve standards and there are early indications that a history of underachievement is being successfully reversed. Newly introduced assessment and tracking systems measure accurately pupils' attainment and progress, and teachers use this data with increasing confidence and effectiveness to ensure that their teaching focuses on meeting pupils' learning needs. A significant development is the successful introduction of more rigorous twice-termly pupils' progress meetings which ensure that teachers and the school leaders have a very clear picture of the impact of teaching on all pupils' achievement.

Pupils' progress is increasingly secure in Years 5 and 6 in reading, writing and mathematics, and there is emerging evidence of an improving trend in attainment. In Year 4, progress is more rapid in reading and writing than in mathematics, but in Year 3, there has been little progress in reading and mathematics, although there are more positive indications of progress in writing. Standards in handwriting and presentation vary from subject to subject. In science, lower expectations means that untidy work occasionally goes unchallenged, and the quality of handwriting generally is weaker in most of the younger classes, except where teachers effectively model a clear cursive style.

Pupils who have a special educational need or disability make better progress in reading, writing and mathematics because of a sharper focus being placed on accurately monitoring their progress and ensuring that interventions are more effectively meeting their needs.

Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school and feel that their work is improving. Most have a clear understanding of their targets and how to achieve them. In older classes, targets are challenging, but this is not a consistent picture throughout the school. In some classes, the level of challenge for higher-ability pupils is not sufficiently demanding.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- Ensure rapid improvement in pupils' learning and progress in reading, writing and mathematics – satisfactory

### **The quality of teaching**

Teachers demonstrate a whole-hearted commitment to raise standards in teaching and there is emerging evidence that the monitoring, training and support that they receive has a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching. Pupils are very positive about their lessons and say that they feel these have become more interesting recently. No inadequate teaching was observed during the inspection, although more was satisfactory than good. Although good teaching was seen throughout the school, the greater proportion was in Years 5 and 6.

Across the school, learning objectives and success criteria are explained well in lessons, so pupils have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. Most teaching assistants have a greater impact on pupils' learning because of recent training in, for example, how to use questioning to accurately assess pupils' understanding. In the best lessons, talk partners and peer assessment systems are used very effectively to support learning and promote good progress. For example, in one lesson, pupils were enthusiastically and accurately assessing each other's work on characters that appear in the poem *The Highwayman*, by Alfred Noyes. A wider range of teaching strategies are being used to ensure that pupils engage more effectively in their learning. For example, in one lesson, 'mini-plenary' sessions were being used well to model persuasive writing so that pupils had a better understanding of their writing activity. Relationships between adults and pupils are good and, although the pace of learning in less effective lessons is slowed by low-level disruption, pupils' behaviour is generally well managed. The level of challenge in lessons varies. Where teaching is stronger, pupils of all abilities are set tasks appropriate to their abilities, but in some lessons there is insufficient challenge for higher-ability pupils. Although pupils have positive attitudes towards reading, the

teaching of reading varies and the school recognises the need to rationalise its approach towards teaching phonics (letters and sounds).

The quality of medium-term planning has improved with an increasingly clear focus on how the needs of pupils of different abilities will be met. Annotated notes on some plans indicate that they are being suitably adjusted to reflect pupils' ongoing learning needs.

The school has introduced an improved marking policy and this is being used consistently throughout the school. Written guidance is usually detailed and evaluative, especially in English, although this varies in mathematics and science. The focus on pupils assessing their own work and progress against learning objectives is a growing strength, but is not fully embedded. At best, this helps pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and teachers to assess more accurately their understanding.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve rapidly the quality of teaching in English and mathematics so that the large majority is good or better – satisfactory

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Pupils behave well and say that they feel safe in school. Those interviewed were very positive about their learning and say that they enjoy coming to school. Attendance is broadly average and improving because of effective systems to keep parents and carers informed about punctuality and attendance. The behaviour of pupils is further enhanced by good opportunities for their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. Music and drama are particular strengths.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

The drive and ambition of the headteacher, who has only been in post for seven months, is the main reason why the school has made such a positive start to addressing the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. He displays a dogged determination to address underachievement and this is shared by staff. The school accurately evaluates its own performance because rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning ensures high levels of accountability so that weaker practice is being identified and addressed. Early indications are that standards and provision are improving and consequentially challenging targets in English and mathematics, and in the quality of teaching, are increasingly likely to be met.

Unavoidable upheavals in the school's leadership have been very well managed and a well-conceived interim management structure ensures that the drive for improvement is not interrupted, although this needs embedding so that the full impact of some middle managers becomes clearer.

Strategic plans are very well focused on the key issues for improvement and these help to ensure that improvement is sustained and secure. The Interim Executive Board brings relevant skills and experience to the school and has a very clear understanding of its role. However, it has only been in place for a month so, although early signs are promising, it is too soon to judge its impact on the school's drive to improve.

Progress since the last section 5 inspection on the area for improvement:

- Improve the effectiveness of leaders, including the governing body, and build leaders' capacity to drive and sustain improvement - satisfactory

### **External support**

Weaknesses that Ofsted had identified in the local authority's Statement of Action have been addressed because suitable milestones against which to measure progress have now been identified. Consequentially, it is now fit for purpose.

The local authority provides satisfactory support for the school and this is starting to have a positive impact on the school's capacity to improve. This support has been carefully planned to ensure that it is proportionate to the school's needs. A strength is the determined way in which the local authority has engaged with the school to address long-term weaknesses. For example, a range of creative solutions such as coaching, support from schools with recognised expertise and leaders in education have been put in place. As a result, teachers' expectations have been raised and this is starting to have a significant impact on addressing a history of underachievement. However, there is transparent recognition that the school is at an early stage of addressing complex and long-term issues and that much still needs to be done to ensure that the necessary improvements are secure and sustainable.