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Mr M Sambrook
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Sambrook

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Townhill Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 23 and 24 May 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 second 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 – good

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good

Newly qualified teachers may 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 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 second monitoring inspection on 23 and 24 May 2012

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, including assessment data, strategic plans and monitoring evidence. He met with the headteacher, pupils, staff, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and a representative of the local authority. Teaching was observed in each year group and pupils' work was scrutinised.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection the school has restructured the senior leadership team and established two assistant headteacher posts, which have been filled with internal appointments, and clarified the role of the inclusion manager. The roles of Interim Executive Board members have been embedded and staffing issues caused by long-term sickness are being resolved. One new teaching assistant has been appointed. Pupil numbers have remained stable.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement has improved significantly since the last monitoring inspection, although the pace of improvement is more rapid in the upper school (Years 5 and 6) than the lower school (Years 3 and 4). Attainment in Years 5 and 6 has improved significantly in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's assessment and tracking data indicate that pupils' writing is above age-related expectations and the accuracy of such judgements is confirmed by inspection evidence. In reading and mathematics, pupils' achievement has also improved considerably in the upper school, especially over the last few months. This is largely due to a significant improvement in the quality of teaching and the very good use that teachers are now making of accurate assessment and progress data to plan their teaching so that it meets the needs of pupils. This is particularly evident in the way in which the needs of higher attaining pupils are being met. Consequentially, inspection evidence supports the school's view that the percentage of Year 6 pupils achieving expected levels in English and mathematics is currently on track to be similar to that found nationally and the percentage achieving the higher levels (including Level 6) is expected to exceed national expectations. This is a significant improvement on last year's outcomes.

In Years 3 and 4 progress is slower, but there is clear evidence of an improving trend. In Year 4 the percentage of pupils reaching age-expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics has improved rapidly over the year, although standards in reading are currently slightly below the school's target. In Year 3, pupils have made

satisfactory progress. This is because the embedding of a more systematic approach to teaching phonics is at an early stage, so progress in reading in Year 3 has been slower. Pupils started the year with skills below levels expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics and a slow start was made in addressing the issues. However, more recently the rate of progress, especially in mathematics, has accelerated and pupils are on track to achieve challenging targets. Standards of presentation and handwriting are not as good in the lower school as in the upper school, where improvements since the last monitoring visit have been significant.

The achievement of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is a strength. This is because the assessment and tracking data are being used very effectively to identify both need and underachievement and well-focused interventions are having a significant impact on narrowing achievement gaps. The school is particularly effective in ensuring that pupils with challenging behaviour have their behaviour and learning needs met well, for example through the use of the 'Rainbow room'.

Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school and feel that they are making good progress. In the lessons observed during the inspection pupils showed themselves to be enthusiastic learners, for example in one lesson where pupils were working diligently on planning and writing a newspaper report.

Progress since the last monitoring inspection on the area for improvement.

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

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the previous monitoring inspection. Inspection evidence confirms the school's own rigorous monitoring which indicates that inadequate teaching has been eradicated and the majority of teaching is good, with an increasing proportion that is outstanding. The most effective teaching is in the upper school, which is where pupils have made the greatest progress. However, there are now significant and consistent strengths in teaching across the school.

Learning objectives in lessons are accessible to pupils, linking well to clearly stated success criteria. A common planning structure has ensured that teaching is flexible and well matched to pupils' different learning needs and that teaching uses detailed assessment data to ensure that good account is taken of pupils' prior learning. Teachers are highly effective in the use of questioning techniques to assess and extend learning. Pupils are actively encouraged to think for themselves. For example, in Year 6 mathematics lessons pupils were fully engaged in an extremely challenging task during which they needed to find logical systems to solve a

problem. The quality of discussion, thought and clear thinking demonstrated by the pupils in these lessons was outstanding. Teachers use information and communication technology well to support teaching and learning and teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. As a result, standards in English and mathematics continue to improve, pupils are highly motivated, behave very well in lessons and feel that, as one pupil commented, 'Every lesson helps. We learn something new every day.' Although all lessons observed during the inspection were at least good, the less effective teaching, which tended to be in the lower school, was characterised by a more variable pace of learning where pupils took longer to settle to tasks.

The marking policy introduced earlier in the year is now well established and effective throughout the school. Books are well marked and written guidance provides clear guidance on how it can be improved. Pupils know their targets and effectively assess their own progress against clear success criteria in English and mathematics, although this is underdeveloped in science.

Progress since the last monitoring 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 – good

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils say that they feel safe and behave well both in lessons and around school. Issues of low-level disruption noted at the previous monitoring inspection have been largely resolved. Pupils say that rare instances of bullying and poor behaviour are always dealt with swiftly and appropriately. There are numerous opportunities to encourage pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Attendance has improved slightly but remains close to the national average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The fact that so much has been achieved, both since the school was judged to require special measures and the last monitoring inspection, is due to the energy, commitment and leadership skills of the headteacher. The restructuring of the senior management team is already having a significant impact on improving the quality of teaching and raising pupils' attainment. Assistant headteachers have risen to the challenge of their new posts and are being well trained in, for example, using coaching skills to encourage teachers to question and improve their practice. The clarification of the role of inclusion manager has had a significant impact on ensuring that well-focused support is given to a range of groups of pupils, and there is secure evidence that achievement gaps are narrowing as a consequence. Curriculum leaders have a very clear understanding of their roles and well-developed monitoring

and strategic planning are ensuring that residual weaknesses are accurately identified and suitably addressed.

The well-led and organised Interim Executive Board is now securely established. Its members know the school well and provide an appropriate balance between challenge and support which is helping to drive improvement. They are aware of the need to establish succession plans for the future.

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 – good

External support

The local authority continues to provide appropriate and proportionate support, either directly through school improvement advisers, or through brokering external support, for example through a local teaching school alliance. Local authority officers' visit notes suggest that they have a clear understanding of the progress that the school has made although this tends to be based more on data analysis and indirect evidence than direct observations of teaching. Nevertheless, judgements are accurate and the authority officers rightly recognise the value and impact of the school's own in-house ability to drive forward improvements.