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Mrs Nichola Gibson
Headteacher
Ellison Primary School
Ellison Street
Wolstanton
Newcastle
ST5 0BL

Dear Mrs Gibson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ellison Primary School

Following my visit with Lyn Field, additional inspector, to your school on 13–14 September 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2012. 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published 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 Deputy Chief Executive and Director for People at Staffordshire local authority.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Spencer
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2012

- Accelerate pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - improving the teaching of letters and sounds (phonics) in Key Stage 1
 - improving the accuracy of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar
 - ensuring that pupils produce a good amount of writing and have sufficient time to practise their skills
 - consistently implementing the school's calculation policy and ensuring that pupils complete a broad range of mathematical work.

- Boost the progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs by:
 - developing teachers' knowledge of disabilities and special educational needs
 - raising teachers' expectations of what disabled pupils and those with special educational needs can achieve
 - ensuring that support sessions are taught well and tailored carefully to meet pupils' needs
 - rigorously monitoring the progress of these pupils and robustly evaluating the impact of additional support.

- Eradicate inadequate teaching by:
 - making certain that teachers understand exactly what pupils are expected to learn in each lesson
 - making certain that work is carefully matched to pupils' needs
 - checking learning more frequently in lessons, including when pupils are working independently
 - ensuring that modelling, marking and target setting are used more effectively in order that pupils know exactly how to improve their work.

- Improve the impact of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by:
 - stabilising staffing so that there is greater continuity of provision for pupils
 - developing the skills of the new leadership team
 - improving the curriculum to develop pupils' basic skills.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 13–14 March 2012

Evidence

During this inspection, the inspection team observed the school's work and scrutinised a broad range of documents, including the local authority's statement of action, school monitoring records, action plans and assessment tracking data, minutes from meetings of the core group and governing body, and the school's single central record of suitability checks. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, a representative of the local authority, the Local Leader of Education (LLE) headteacher and representatives of the governing body. Informal conversations took place with parents and carers on the playground. The inspection team observed 12 lessons, taught by 12 teachers, and spoke to two different groups of pupils.

Context

Since the last inspection, five teachers have left the school. Five new teachers, including a new assistant headteacher, have been appointed from September 2012. During the Summer term 2012, there were high levels of staff absence. A number of teachers provided cover for these absences on a short-term basis. The local authority has appointed a Local Leader of Education (LLE), a headteacher from a local school recognised for its good practice, to support the work of the school.

Achievement of pupils at the school

As at the time of the last inspection, children continue to make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Attainment at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 remains below the national average. The latest unvalidated data for 2012 suggest that attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is higher in both key stages than in 2011, and indicate that the school meets current government floor standards. However, these improvements are fragile. School data indicate that pupils in some classes do not make enough progress over time, particularly in mathematics in Years 2, 3 and 4 and in writing in Years 3 and 4. Discussions with pupils and scrutiny of work in their books highlight weaknesses in their mental calculation strategies, including rapid recall of multiplication facts, and weaknesses in spelling, reading and writing skills.

The teaching of letters and sounds (phonics) has improved in Key Stage 1, and a structured programme of teaching is in place to develop pupils' reading skills. However, the impact of these sessions is limited because teaching is not always pitched at the right level for pupils of different abilities. School leaders have revised

the school's calculation policy to focus more explicitly on the development of pupils' calculation skills, and expectations of progression in the quality of pupils' sentence construction have been agreed by staff. However, these are recent developments and it is too early to judge their impact on raising pupils' achievement. Pupils are given more frequent opportunities to write at length but there are inconsistencies between classes in teachers' expectations of what pupils are able to achieve. Similarly, teachers' expectations of the standard of pupils' handwriting and presentation are also too variable between classes.

School data indicate that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are beginning to make improved progress. However, systems to measure the impact of specific intervention programmes upon their progress are underdeveloped. Teaching assistants were observed providing appropriate support for pupils with special educational needs in lessons. On some occasions, the pace of learning is too slow for these pupils because teaching does not meet their needs. For example, in some lessons, pupils with special educational needs are kept on the carpet for too long at the beginning of the lesson, and become frustrated because they are unable to access learning. Teachers have received appropriate training to support the development of their knowledge and understanding of pupils with special educational needs but the impact of this has been limited because a number of teachers have just arrived at the school and are new to their roles. There are firm plans to engage new teachers in relevant training.

The quality of teaching

Many teachers are very new to the school and are still becoming familiar with the school's expectations and routines. However, the quality of teaching is improving because school leaders have taken some appropriate actions to address a large proportion of inadequate teaching. However, there is still an insufficient proportion of good teaching to make up for pupils' prior underachievement.

Marking of pupils' work has improved and is good. As a result, pupils are becoming more engaged in learning. For example, some pupils in Year 6 engage in written dialogue about learning with their teachers, in response to their teacher's comments. Teachers are clearer about what they expect children to learn and ensure that learning objectives are shared with pupils at the beginning of lessons. However, on some occasions, the language used by teachers in communicating learning objectives is too complex. This means that the objectives are sometimes inaccessible to some pupils and make no impact upon improved learning. Systems to set targets for pupils to help them to understand the next steps they need to take in learning remain underdeveloped.

On some occasions, the pace of learning is slower than it could be because lessons fail to get off to a prompt start, or pupils are slow to begin learning tasks following the teacher's introduction. In lessons where teaching is less than good, teachers

often talk for too long, causing pupils to lose attention and focus and to become passive learners. Opportunities are missed in these lessons for teachers to check pupils' understanding and also for pupils to share learning with each other and consolidate their ideas through discussion.

In the most effective lessons, teachers plan activities to meet the needs of all pupils, including those who are disabled or have special educational needs. Pupils buzz with enthusiasm in these lessons because teachers ensure that they are excited by learning and frequently check to ensure that pupils make good progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils demonstrate appropriate and considerate behaviour, which enables lessons to proceed without interruption. In lessons where the quality of teaching is good, pupils are completely engaged in learning and, as a result, their behaviour is often at least good. In lessons where the pace of learning is too slow, behaviour is less than good and some pupils become fidgety and lose interest. Pupils feel safe in school, adopt safe practices and report that they enjoy coming to school. This is reflected in attendance which has improved and is now above average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

High levels of staff absence and a lack of continuity of provision for pupils in recent years have hampered the school's progress. Leaders have been successful in appointing new, experienced and enthusiastic staff to the school, and reducing class sizes in some year groups. The impact of these changes upon pupils' improved achievement will be evaluated thoroughly at the time of the next inspection visit. Lesson observations during the inspection largely indicate that newly appointed staff have a good understanding of teaching and learning.

Although the headteacher and other senior leaders have undertaken observations of teaching, these have been too infrequent to enable them to gain a thorough and comprehensive understanding of teachers' strengths and weaknesses. As a result, leaders have not offered sufficient levels of challenge and support to staff to help them to improve. There are firm plans to increase the frequency of lesson observations, both within the school and in other local schools recognised for their good practice, to enable colleagues to better support, challenge and learn from each other.

The governing body has received relevant training and has an improved understanding of its role. Governors have an accurate overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are becoming increasingly involved in monitoring the impact of the school's actions upon improved pupil outcomes.

There are effective systems to track the progress made by different groups of pupils and the school's improvement plans are well structured. Leaders have produced an effective termly action plan to better communicate to all staff, and promote consistency in the understanding of, the school's main priorities for the coming term.

The curriculum has been improved and promotes the development of pupils' basic skills across a range of subjects and topics as they move through the school. However, opportunities are missed to incorporate the development of pupils' mathematics and extended writing skills into learning in some subjects.

External support

Appropriate guidance and support have been provided by the local authority, particularly in assisting senior leaders during a period of high staff turnover. The local authority statement of action has been amended and is now fit for purpose. It provides an appropriate framework for improvement. A local authority governor, experienced in working with schools subject to special measures, is due to join the governing body imminently. The opportunity was missed to make this appointment at an earlier stage to further accelerate the pace of change. The LLE headteacher has a good understanding of the school's needs and provides effective support for the school.