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31 January 2013

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 Suha Ahmad Additional Inspector to your school on 29–30 January 2013, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second 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 Director of Children's Services for 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 second monitoring inspection on 29-30 January 2013**

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents including the school's development plans, minutes from governing body meetings, data on pupils' progress, and the school's single central record of staff suitability checks. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, two groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Local Leader of Education (LLE) headteacher, and a representative of the local authority. Informal conversations took place with parents and carers on the playground. Inspectors observed 14 lessons, taught by 14 teachers. This accounted for more than seven hours of inspection time.

### **Context**

Two teachers are currently absent from the school on long-term sick leave. One of these posts is being covered by a teacher already in school. The other is being covered by a long-term supply teacher. A new local authority governor has joined the governing body.

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

Pupils' standards in reading, writing and mathematics across the school continue to be below average in the large majority of classes. In all year groups, with the exception of Year 3, pupils' attainment in reading continues to be stronger than in mathematics. Pupils across the school made good progress in the autumn term 2012 because the quality of teaching is improving. However, work in pupils' exercise books indicates that the progress that some pupils are making is not as strong as school data suggests.

In the Year 6 cohort in 2012, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals made significantly weaker progress than similar pupils nationally in mathematics as they moved through Key Stage 2. However, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals are now making stronger progress and beginning to close the gaps on their peers because teachers are planning learning activities more effectively to meet their needs.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are making improved progress because leaders rigorously monitor the progress of these pupils and ensure that the support they receive is appropriate. During the inspection, a Year 3 pupil was observed making good progress working in a phonics group with younger children because the work was at just the right level for him.

Pupils are becoming increasingly skilled in their use of calculation in mathematics, including their rapid recall of multiplication facts. This is because staff have become more consistent in their use of the school's calculation policy. The introduction of short, sharply focused bursts of daily mathematics teaching, known as 'maths blasts', and a strong focus on pupils' learning of multiplication facts have also played important roles in supporting pupils' improved confidence and progress. Due to previous underachievement, there are still gaps in pupils' learning in mathematics. For example, in upper Key Stage 2, pupils struggle with simple problems involving fractions and time.

Pupils are making stronger progress in developing phonics (the sounds that letters make) skills because the teaching of phonics has further improved since the last monitoring visit. Pupils now work in ability groups and this is supporting staff in targeting their teaching to more accurately meet pupils' needs.

Pupils' spelling and use of grammar and punctuation are improving, but are still below expected levels for their age. The profile of writing has been raised and pupils are beginning to take increased pride in their work. Pupils took pleasure in showing inspectors the newly introduced writing walls in school corridors which show progression in pupils' writing skills as they move through the school. Pupils are also proud of their new 'extended writing books' which enable them to write at length and demonstrate how their knowledge and skills are improving. The introduction of 'sentence menus' (writing prompts which hang on string across classrooms) is also supporting the development of pupils' confidence in writing. Pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their work in exercise books continue to be too variable. This is due to a lack of consistency in teachers' expectations of pupils' handwriting and because the school's presentation policy is not always adhered to.

### **The quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching is improving and this is supporting the improved progress of different groups of pupils. No inadequate teaching was observed during this inspection. The proportion of good or better lessons observed during this visit has doubled since the last monitoring visit. This improvement is encouraging, but is slightly below the challenging local authority target of 60% by the end of December 2012.

Teachers now routinely identify success criteria for pupils in each lesson. This is helping to underpin improvements in teaching quality because teachers and pupils are using them to improve their focus on, and evaluation of, learning. However, there are still some teachers who do not use success criteria as well as others. When this happens, they simply become checklists for completing a sequence of activities rather than a gauge of how effective their learning has been.

Teachers continue to mark pupils' books effectively, providing constructive feedback about the next steps of learning they need to take. This is making a positive impact on pupils' improved learning and progress. However, teachers' comments and feedback in pupils' writing books tend to be more constructive and useful than the comments they write in pupils' mathematics books.

Systems to set improvement targets for pupils are better developed than at the time of the last monitoring visit. Appropriate targets are set for pupils in reading, writing and mathematics in their individual target books. Pupils increasingly refer to their targets to support their learning. Teachers' accuracy in assessing pupils' work is improving because they have received appropriate training to support the development of their skills. However, a small minority of teachers either assess pupils' standards too harshly or are over-generous in judging the progress that pupils make in learning. The school intends that these teachers will continue to receive support during the spring term to improve their practice.

Teaching assistants play an increasingly valuable role in supporting pupils' learning, particularly those pupils who find learning difficult. A list of 'non-negotiables' has been drawn up by leaders and teaching assistants. This has helped to develop consistency between the ways in which teaching assistants operate across the school and has raised the expectations of their contributions to pupils' learning. Learning environments have improved considerably since last inspection. Teachers and pupils frequently make use of classroom displays and learning prompts to support teaching and learning. Classrooms and corridors are bright, colourful and stimulating places to work and learn in.

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

Pupils generally demonstrate positive attitudes towards each other and to learning. Some challenging behaviour was observed during the monitoring visit but this was managed effectively by staff. Pupils respond to any staff prompts about their behaviour and report that they feel safe in school. Pupils' attendance in the 2011/2012 academic year was above average. Pupils' attendance in the autumn term 2012 dropped slightly to a lower level than in the previous year. Attendance will be monitored again during the next HMI visit

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

A well-structured termly action plan and concise weekly monitoring plans have ensured that staff and senior leaders have remained focused on the school's improvement priorities. Senior leaders have worked very effectively with partners, including the local authority and the partner school. This has led to a good number of improvements being made in a short period of time, which are impacting positively on pupils' progress.

The raised expectations of leaders have been made clear to staff and this has led to a determination amongst staff to improve. Staff have responded positively to the additional training they have received. They have also been proactive in transferring the key elements of strong practice they have seen in other schools into their own practice. For example, the school's improved phonics programme and teachers' use of success criteria to support pupils' learning in lessons draw from practice observed in the partner school.

Although there are strong signs that the school is improving, this view is not shared by all parents and carers. Parents and carers agree that the quality of teaching is improving, but some believe that school leaders and staff do not communicate with them as well as they could do. Senior leaders and the governing body have well-developed plans to set up a parent forum group to support improved communication and consultation with parents and carers. The impact of this group, and the school's progress in engaging more effectively with parents and carers, will be evaluated again during the next monitoring visit.

The governing body has been strengthened through the appointment of a new local authority governor who has led appropriate training for governors, including training to support their improved use of data about pupils' performance. As a result, and through a more comprehensive programme of visits to observe the school's work, the governing body has a strong and accurate understanding of the school's current position. Governing body minutes indicate that they have used this improved knowledge and understanding of the school to provide a stronger level of challenge to school leaders and hold them more closely to account.

Teachers tie the development of pupils' basic skills into learning across the curriculum (the topics and subjects that pupils learn about) increasingly well. For example, success criteria used in lessons often refer to the development of a targeted literacy or numeracy skill. However, senior leaders have quite rightly recognised that the roles of subject leaders in subjects other than English and mathematics now need to be developed to add further capacity to the leadership of the school, and to support the further improvement of the school's broader curriculum.

### **External support**

The school has received good support from the local authority and LLE partnership school since the last monitoring visit. The local authority has provided appropriate training to the governing body, including training to develop governors' understanding of data about pupils' performance. As a result, governors have been able to ask school leaders more challenging questions and hold them to account more effectively. Staff from the LLE partner school have supported improvements to the quality of teaching by sharing good classroom practice and have also helped to improve the quality of the school's programme to teach phonics.