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Mohammed Nawaz
Acting Headteacher
Al-Hijrah School
Cherrywood Centre
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Dear Mohammed Nawaz

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Al-Hijrah School, Birmingham local authority.

Following my visit to your school on 22 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, three senior leaders, the Chair and three representatives of the governing body, and representatives of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met a headteacher from a local school who has been supporting your improvement work. I evaluated the school action plan. In the morning I made a tour of the school, on both sites, and made short visits to a number of lessons.

Context

Since the inspection on 6-7 March 2013 there have been a number of changes to the governing body. Six governors left and were replaced by new governors. A new chair was elected at the end of the governors' meeting on 23 March 2013; he has subsequently chaired a number of meetings, the first being on 27 March 2013. Following the 6-7 March 2013 inspection the headteacher stood down. As the deputy headteacher you then accepted the governors' request to take on the role of acting

headteacher. The head of English has been absent due to illness and so the English department is being led by another staff member.

Classes for pupils in years reception, 1, 2, 3 and 4 are currently situated in a local school. This is because the mobile classrooms which have been erected on the school's site cannot be used because they are too close to a hazardous factory site opposite the school and therefore raise health and safety issues. There are plans to move the mobile classrooms to a safe location on the school site.

Soon after the 6-7 March 2013 inspection the local authority issued the school with a warning notice under Section 60(2) (a) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 which highlighted the local authority's concerns about the school. The school appealed to Ofsted against the warning notice. At the time of my visit no decision had been reached.

Main findings

Senior leaders have taken action to improve the quality of teaching through training and support for teachers whose teaching is not yet good and for those who have the potential to be outstanding. There has been a concerted focus on improving teachers' questioning in lessons and their marking of pupils' work. Senior leaders are aware that there is still much more to do to ensure that work is always matched to pupils' different abilities.

As acting headteacher, you are now leading the improvement work. Greater levels of accountability are being put in place to ensure subject leaders are more effective. There are plans to reorganise the leadership of teaching and learning for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.

The main school improvement plan, an overview of the actions the school intends to take, is still in draft format. The plan does not have clear, measurable success criteria nor do the more detailed plans which support it. Senior leaders took advice from a number of external consultants when drafting the improvement plans but this has resulted in the plan and actions, being delayed. Consequently, the pace of improvement has slowed because the plan has not been ready.

The governing body has met regularly since the inspection. The relationship it has with the local authority was described by governors as 'highly strained'. There appears to be little agreement between the local authority and the school on how pupil standards, weak teaching and governance can be improved. The governing body has been slow to organise an external review of governance; this has now been organised and will take place at the end of June 2013.

Although the governing body is more focused on the school's strategic direction there remains an undercurrent of dissatisfaction from a small group of vociferous parents about how governors are fulfilling their responsibilities. The school has put in

place a good range of opportunities for parents to engage with governors and senior staff to hear about, and discuss, the way the school is planning to improve.

There remains a significant overspend of the school budget. At the time of my visit, you were unable to inform me as to the exact amount. This is a grave concern. Planned changes to staffing should improve matters but there remains a considerable amount of work to do to ensure the budget deficit is reduced. This is an urgent priority for action.

The use of a local school to house the Reception classes and classes for Years 1, 2, 3 and 4 will no longer be available in September 2013. The school intends to move the existing mobile classrooms but has yet to receive planning permission to do this. As a matter of urgency, this accommodation issue needs to be tackled.

Although, there was evidence that some changes have been made to improve the school, the concerns I have lead me to judge that senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. Furthermore, plans are still not sharply focused on how improvement will be evaluated. The school should take immediate action to:

- ensure that the planned move of the mobile classrooms takes place before September 1 2013
- the school's action plan has measurable targets which can be used to evaluate the school's progress at regular interval
- obtain accurate budget details, monitor regularly and take action to reduce the deficit as quickly as possible
- foster professional working relationships with the local authority.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

Considering the concerns raised as a result of this visit, I should like to meet with the full governing body as soon as it has received feedback following the review of governance. At this meeting, I would also like to explore the possibility of:

- providing HMI support for your work to improve English standards across the school
- training on governance.

External support

The school's strained relationship with the local authority has meant that the school has been reluctant to draw upon the support that has been proposed. Through issuing the warning notice, the local authority makes clear its intention to support and challenge the school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Cook
Her Majesty's Inspector