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David Brown
Al-Hijrah School
Cherrywood Centre
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Dear Mr Brown

Special measures monitoring inspection of Al-Hijrah School

Following my visit with Peter Humphries, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 24–25 June 2014, 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 December 2013. 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 not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Cook
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching by making sure that:
 - the work pupils are given to do in all year groups and in all subjects is accurately and consistently matched to their needs and abilities
 - teachers use assessment data accurately to plan for pupils' next steps in their learning
 - disabled pupils and those with special educational needs receive appropriate support in lessons
 - teachers have access to and use the resources that they need to teach the whole curriculum, engage pupils' interest and help them make good progress.

- Improve the progress of pupils in the primary school by:
 - ensuring teaching programmes are pitched at the appropriate level for pupils of different needs and abilities and sequentially build on their skills year-on-year
 - identifying where there are gaps in pupils' learning and taking urgent and effective action to close them
 - urgently agreeing an action plan for improving pupils' writing skills

- Improve behaviour and safety by:
 - developing strategies to tackle bullying and poor behaviour and train staff in their implementation
 - making sure all staff have high expectations of good behaviour
 - ensuring staff model good behaviour and respect for all pupils at all times
 - making sure that pupils consistently experience teaching that motivates them and leads to better attitudes to learning.

- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers, including governors, by:
 - ensuring that tracking and monitoring procedures are systematic and enable leaders to check that pupils are making sufficient progress
 - ensuring that procedures to identify and support disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are robust and that action taken to support these pupils is more effective
 - providing middle leaders with the professional development needed to carry out their roles effectively and establishing a framework that will enable them to check the quality of teaching in their subjects
 - improving the curriculum across the school so that it better meets the needs of all pupils, provides more varied and interesting activities, ensures a better balance between the time allocated to English and mathematics and other subjects and offers more option choices for older pupils
 - using the additional funding for primary sport more effectively

- ensuring that the governing body's work is informed by a clear and well directed vision, that it develops a strategic role and holds leaders to account for their actions
- ensuring finances are managed appropriately, effectively and efficiently
- implementing the recommendations arising from the recent audit of governance.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 24–25 June 2014

Evidence

When Her Majesty's Inspectors arrived at the school on 24 June, they met with the former Chair of the Governing Body and a group of parents who were standing outside the school.

Inspectors visited lessons and scrutinised school documents. They met with the associate headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher from Calthorpe School. They also met the acting headteacher and other senior leaders from Al-Hijrah School. Inspectors spoke with parents at the end of day one of the inspection and met with the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and a representative from the local authority.

Context

Early in March 2014 the local authority made an application to the Department of Education for an Interim Executive Board (IEB). If successful the application would mean that a new set of governors would undertake the responsibility of governance at the school. The application was approved on 16 May 2014. The first meeting of the IEB took place on 21 May 2014. The first attempted visit to the school by the IEB took place on the 22 May. IEB members were unfortunately prevented from entering the school. On 17 June 2014 the first successful visit to the school by the IEB occurred. The acting headteacher resigned on the 10 June and on the same date a senior member of staff from Al-Hijrah took on the role as acting headteacher. The local authority subsequently helped to organise a package of support for Al-Hijrah from Calthorpe School. The support will involve senior leaders from Calthorpe working with the senior leaders from Al-Hijrah to improve the school. An executive headteacher, commissioned by Calthorpe, took up post on 17 June.

On 16 June a meeting for parents of pupils at Al-Hijrah was held by the IEB. At this meeting parents were told about the removal of the previous governing body, the new IEB and the support planned for the school from Calthorpe School.

On 17 June senior leaders from Calthorpe started to support the school.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The Al-Hijrah senior leaders are predicting some positive results for the 2014 Year 6 national tests and for a number of Year 11 examination subjects. The checks on pupils' progress have not been validated by the local authority, apart from those in Year 2. Senior leaders' checks on pupils' progress show a high proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs do not make enough progress.

Pupils' progress in lessons visited by inspectors varied too much. In some lessons, pupils made inadequate progress. Their progress was often hindered because their behaviour was not good.

The quality of teaching

Senior leaders are aware that the quality of teaching across the school varies excessively. In some lessons teaching is failing to ensure pupils make progress.

In some of the lessons visited by inspectors, teachers did not expect pupils to do their best. Teachers were not using the information they had about pupils' progress and attainment to make learning challenging for all pupils. As a result, they gave pupils of different abilities the same work. This meant that more-able pupils were not challenged to make good progress and those pupils who needed extra help were left confused.

Some good teaching was observed by inspectors. In an Arabic lesson for primary pupils, for example, the adult teaching the class was skilled in keeping pupils focused on what they were learning. In response, pupils were keen to answer questions and enjoyed the challenge of learning something new. Likewise, in a Key Stage 4 English lesson, pupils were keen to learn as they considered how power and control are presented in literature. In this lesson the teacher kept checking on how well pupils were learning and asked them challenging questions. Consequently, pupils stayed focused on their work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour in many lessons is not good enough. In only a few of the lessons inspectors visited, were pupils well behaved, focused on the task in hand and keen to learn. In these lessons, teachers were motivating pupils to do their best. In other lessons, pupils did not work as well as they could have done. In some classrooms, teachers allowed pupils to drop litter on the floor, write graffiti on desks and walls and leave books, pens and pencils strewn across tables.

All staff have now received anti-bullying training. In May, staff received training on the 'Prevent strategy', a government funded initiative to promote integration and prevent extremism.

The behaviour policy has been rewritten but was only finalised in March 2014. To promote good behaviour a new electronic system of rewarding pupils, called 'E-praise', where pupils are rewarded with points which they can then use to buy prizes, was launched in March. However, despite this being a useful tool, some governors did not support its use and it has only recently been reinstated.

Attendance overall is close to the national average. There is a gap in some year groups between the attendance of some disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and their peers, especially in Year 11.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Some senior leaders told inspectors that, since the previous monitoring inspection by HMI in April 2014, governors and the former headteacher had deliberately obstructed their work. Some staff said they had felt intimidated by some governors and as a result they had been afraid of speaking out about decisions being made which they believed were preventing the school from improving. Some staff also told inspectors that during this time there had been much talk from governors and the headteacher about how the school would improve, but there was little impact at classroom level. Despite the urgent need to improve the quality of teaching, for example, the governors and the headteacher decided to stop senior leaders visiting lessons to monitor teaching. As a result, senior staff who wanted to support teachers and help them to improve their practice were unable to do so.

The new IEB and senior leaders from Calthorpe School have been extremely well received by staff. Teaching staff who spoke with inspectors shared a resounding optimism about the future prospects for the school. One member of staff said it was like a 'weight being lifted'. While it is clear that the senior leaders supporting the school have acted quickly, there is no clarity yet as to which leaders will actually be in school on which days. The IEB plan to meet in the next few days when they intend to set out in more detail how the support from Calthorpe will be organised.

The schools' budget deficit remains very high; this deficit was inherited by the IEB. The exact figure is not known. The IEB have organised an audit of the budget as a matter of urgency.

What has come to light is the use of school funds to pay for consultancy from a former Chair of a Governing Body from a Birmingham school. The former Chair was contracted by the, then, Al-Hijrah governing body to work in the school as a 'leadership consultant'. Between February and March 2014 the consultant was paid £23,000. There remains a further invoice for £2,700 for the same consultancy work taking place up to 9 June 2014. Inspectors found no evidence to prove any positive impact as a result of the consultant's work. The Chair of the IEB has acted speedily and severed this contract.

There is still confusion about which parts of the buildings belong to the Al-Hijrah Trust which first set up the school as an independent school before it became a local authority school. There is also a lack of clarity around agreements made about rent for the use of the buildings between the Trust and the previous governing body. The IEB are taking swift action to ensure that these matters are resolved as quickly as possible.

Inspectors spoke with a number of parents who voiced their concerns that they felt there was an intention to remove the faith status of the school. Both the IEB and the new amalgamated senior leadership team have reassured parents that the school will remain an Islamic faith school under the control of the local authority.

External support

The local authority has successfully tackled very complex and sensitive issues in order to commission support for the school and ensure a new IEB is in place. The statement of action, the local authority's plans outlining how the local authority will work with the school, has been appropriately amended in light of the new arrangements for support for the school.