Dear Mr Winters

Special measures monitoring inspection of Brownmead Junior and Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 17–18 September 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may 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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children’s Services for Birmingham local authority.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes

Her Majesty’s Inspector
Annex

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

- Improve teaching and accelerate pupils’ progress in Years 3 to 6 by ensuring that teachers:
  - set tasks that are accurately matched to pupils’ abilities
  - spend less time on revising and move on to new work more quickly
  - provide pupils with more opportunities to be independent.

- Improve the leadership and management of the school so that the declining trend in its performance is reversed by:
  - ensuring all leaders, including governors, have the skills necessary to analyse the school’s performance data and understand the messages they provide
  - using the results of such analyses to gain an accurate evaluation of the quality of teaching
  - evaluating lessons more robustly, with a clear focus on the impact that teaching has on how well pupils learn, and providing all staff with areas for improvement that help them raise the quality of teaching
  - widening the range of criteria used to manage the performance of teachers to include the progress made by pupils in more than one subject
  - ensuring governors question the headteacher’s evaluation of the school’s performance more effectively and take prompt action when appropriate.
Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 17–18 September 2014

Evidence

The inspector observed the school’s work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other school staff, groups of pupils, the Chair and members of the Interim Executive Board, the Executive Principal of Washwood Heath Multi-Academy Trust and a representative from the local authority. Informal discussions were held with parents at a ‘Stay and Play’ session and with teachers and pupils in lessons and as they moved around the school.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, one teacher and one teaching assistant have left the school. One teacher is currently on maternity leave and a teaching assistant is off sick. A new teaching assistant and a class teacher joined the school in September. The senior leadership team has been strengthened by the appointment of a teaching and learning manager. The school is currently governed by an interim executive board (IEB). This group has met three times since the previous monitoring visit. The school is due to close at the end of October and to open as an academy, sponsored by the Washwood Heath Multi-Academy Trust, on 1 November.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement is improving. Standards are rising because more pupils are making good progress. National test results for Year 6 pupils in 2014 indicate that most made the progress expected of them and reached age-appropriate levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Nevertheless, because they have underachieved in the past, too few pupils reached the higher levels in reading and writing. The standards reached by Year 2 pupils in the 2014 Key Stage 1 national assessments were above average in mathematics but below average in reading and writing. The school’s own records show that these results were too low because many pupils had not made the progress they should from the start of Year 1. Inspection evidence indicates that some pupils currently in Year 2 are still not making good progress this year.

Teachers and teaching assistants are now more aware of the specific learning needs of different pupils and are becoming more skilled at narrowing gaps in achievement between some groups. For example, the additional support funded by the pupil premium (extra money from the government to support the achievement of disadvantaged pupils) is helping eligible pupils to catch up with their classmates. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are making similar progress to other pupils as a result of the well-planned programme of intervention activities. However, some of these pupils need to make even faster progress if they are to attain the standards of which they are capable. Often, these pupils do not
make as much progress as other pupils in lessons because teachers lack confidence in how to meet their particular needs in class. In some classes, boys and girls attain equally well in reading, writing and mathematics. In others, boys do not achieve as well as girls and the gaps show little sign of narrowing. Inspection evidence also indicates that the most-able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged in lessons and, consequently, do not make consistently good progress to help them attain the higher levels.

The quality of teaching

Teachers have been trained to accurately assess pupils’ achievements and so are more skilled in identifying what pupils can do and in matching tasks to pupils’ abilities. For example, in some Key Stage 2 classes, work is set at three levels of difficulty. Pupils are encouraged to select the level they think will challenge them best. The most effective teachers then check how well pupils are learning throughout the lesson, making adjustments as necessary. The impact of this approach is that pupils take responsibility for their learning, challenge themselves and make good progress. School records, pupils’ books and other inspection evidence indicate this is now happening more often. Not all teachers challenge pupils well enough, however. Some incorporate different levels of challenge but are not sufficiently skilled in varying tasks to ensure that pupils learn effectively. Consequently, rates of progress are inconsistent between different classes and for some groups of pupils, particularly the more able and pupils who find learning more difficult.

Teachers now adhere to agreed processes for marking pupils’ work. In some classes, this is done effectively. These teachers give pupils individual guidance on how to improve their work and support them in following this advice. This is most notable in Years 4, 5 and 6. Not all marking is helpful. Some older pupils in Key Stage 1 are given the same advice repeatedly, such as, ‘Use more adjectives’, even when they have previously made the suggested improvement.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils continue to enjoy learning and participate willingly in lessons and in wider school life. During this inspection, the newly elected house captains confidently and politely welcomed parents to the school as part of ‘Mad Scientist’ day. Throughout the day, all pupils enthusiastically undertook a series of investigative activities intended to foster an interest in science.

The school has continued to be vigilant in maintaining and improving levels of attendance. In particular, the senior learning mentor has worked closely with those families whose children are absent most often. This is helping more pupils to attend regularly.
The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher continues to drive forward his ambition for the school to provide the best possible education for its pupils. He is now supported by a stronger senior leadership team which clearly understands its responsibilities. Senior leaders now monitor pupils’ performance data more closely and use this information to judge whether pupils are making enough progress. For example, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs now make better progress than they did previously because the special educational needs coordinator carefully tracks the progress they make and increasingly ensures that well-targeted intervention programmes help to meet their needs.

Senior leaders have a broadly accurate view of the quality of teaching in each class. Nevertheless, their judgements are still sometimes too generous because they do not always sufficiently reflect pupils’ progress, particularly where this has been unacceptable. For example, senior leaders judge there is no longer inadequate teaching in the school, yet pupils in one year group made inadequate progress last year in reading, writing and mathematics.

Leaders have established a simple, yet effective, system for providing teachers with areas for improvement and checking if these have been acted upon. This has been a key strategy in securing improvements to the quality of teaching. The recently appointed teaching and learning manager is skilled at analysing the impact teaching has upon pupils’ learning. She identifies clear, sensible targets for teachers to use to help them improve.

Subject leaders have begun to review approaches to teaching English and mathematics to meet the requirements of the new National Curriculum. The impact of this is already evident in mathematics, where pupils’ books show a more systematic approach to the teaching of basic number skills. The science leader organised the successful ‘Mad Scientist’ day observed during this inspection. Nevertheless, the role of these leaders is still underdeveloped as it does not contribute sufficiently to improvements in the quality of teaching.

At the time of the last monitoring visit, there was no governing body in place and the local authority had not secured an interim executive board. Since then, an interim executive board has been established and has met three times. Its members willingly act to improve their skills and understanding by undertaking training and seeking advice. Members have begun to hold the headteacher to account for the rate of improvement. For example, they have challenged the headteacher to provide appropriate information about pupils’ achievement to help them evaluate the impact of the school’s actions to improve the quality of teaching.

The Chair of the Interim Executive Board is also the Executive Principal of the Washwood Heath Academy Trust, which is scheduled to become the sponsor of the
school from 1 November. The two schools have been working closely together since September 2013 in preparation for this conversion, so are well prepared for transition. Washwood Heath has been the main provider of the effective support and challenge to the school, so is well placed to ensure improvement continues after the school becomes an academy. The school has sought to keep parents informed of developments during the conversion process. Those spoken to during the inspection are satisfied with the degree of consultation.

**External support**

The school has been well supported by other local schools to strengthen leadership and improve the quality of teaching. The local authority has not supported the school well while it has required special measures. Long delays in securing an interim executive board have now been addressed. However, these delays mean that the interim executive board, while capable and enthusiastic, is still relatively new and inexperienced. The local authority has not provided external challenge to the school to demonstrate whether improvement is happening quickly enough. Therefore the local authority has not acted to ensure that pupils are safe from risk or that they are receiving an acceptable standard of education.