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Lynne Law
Executive Headteacher
Dunstall Hill Primary School
Dunstall Avenue
Wolverhampton
WV6 0NH

Dear Mrs Law

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Dunstall Hill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 December 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in 18 June 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- make sure all legal requirements to safeguard pupils are in place
- provide effective governance
- set out a clear strategy to provide effective leadership for the school.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the head of school, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A range of documentation was reviewed, including information about safeguarding, teacher recruitment and pupils' achievement, as well as a review of pupils' work. You and the head of school accompanied me on several short

visits to classrooms to observe pupils' learning in lessons.

Context

Since my previous monitoring visit in September 2014, there have been several changes to the senior leadership of the school. There is no substantive headteacher. The acting headteacher has returned to her substantive role as deputy headteacher and is currently absent from school. The Chair of the Governing Body has resigned. A new Chair was elected on the 24 November 2014.

For a short period the headteacher of a successful school provided support for two days each week. Support is now being provided by the St Martin's and Field View Federation. The executive headteacher of the federation is acting as the executive headteacher of Dunstall Hill. In addition to this, an interim head of school is leading the school on a day-to-day basis. These arrangements have in place since the 22 November 2014. Two class teachers are leaving at the end of this term, as of yet replacements have not been recruited.

Main findings

Little action or improvement has taken place since my visit in September 2014. The frequent changes in the temporary leadership of the school are hampering rapid and sustained improvement, consequently, teaching is not improving quickly enough to have a significant impact on pupils' learning.

In the short time since your appointment at the end of November you have found that areas of weakness identified at my previous visit have not been tackled and you have uncovered further areas of concern.

While sensitive to the personal circumstances and the training needs of individuals, you are determined to confront weaknesses, which persist. You and the head of school have made a positive start by quickly gaining the confidence of staff, bringing much needed stability and order to the school. Plans for further improvement cover all of the areas that were identified in the last inspection and some additional aspects that you have rightly included. You rightly have a clear focus on raising pupils' attainment.

At my last visit I noted that there were weaknesses in safeguarding pupils. You have quite rightly, conducted a full review of all safeguarding procedures. The review found that there are still serious inadequacies within the safeguarding at the school. In particular record keeping and the management of individual children's files are not in line with Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children's Board. Worryingly, the review found that clear pathways to challenge managers and colleagues are failing. The review also found that Governors' understanding of safeguarding is out of date. You are quite rightly, focusing on making sure that all 52 recommendations are

acted upon as a matter of urgency. In particular, you are prioritising those recommendations relating to pupils who are most at risk of harm.

Your work on assessment is helping to establish a more accurate baseline from which pupils' progress can be measured. This work is improving teachers' understanding of the amount of progress that pupils are expected to make over time. A range of systems and procedures are being introduced to help teachers to plan work at the correct level for pupils. The correct things are being put in place but it is too soon for these changes to have made a significant difference to pupils' achievement. For example, you are providing effective training to improve teachers' knowledge of the sounds that letters make (phonics) and have reintroduced a highly structured phonic programme. Reading corners in all classrooms have been improved, as a result reading has a higher presence in the school.

With the support of the local authority, the governing body has undertaken the recommended external review of governance. Based on the results of the review, the local authority sensibly issued the governing body with a warning notice and applied to the Secretary of State for Education for permission to disband the governing body and replace it with an interim executive board. It is vital that these arrangements are finalised and an interim executive board be in place before the end of this term.

The strengths in your leadership are offset by its temporary nature and by the weaknesses in governance. Therefore, the outcome of this visit will be discussed with the Regional Director and may have an impact on the timing of the next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority struggled to establish secure and effective temporary leadership within the school. It set out a programme for improvement in its action plan, which had the potential to drive the school improvement, but the provisional leadership arrangements have meant that the speed of improvement has been too slow. The current appointment of executive and interim head of school is effective; unfortunately this arrangement is due to end at Christmas further reducing the capacity for rapid improvement. Monitoring arrangements are not frequent enough to secure decisive intervention where progress is not good enough.

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

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector