

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0121 679 9153
Direct email: naik.sandhu@serco.com

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David Brown
Executive Headteacher
Al-Hijrah School
Burbidge Road
Birmingham
B9 4US

Dear Mr Brown

Special measures monitoring inspection of Al-Hijrah School

Following my visit with Jane Millward, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Charlotte Evers, Additional Inspector, to your school on 10–11 March 2015, 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 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint up to four newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection if advice and support are provided by a senior leader whose quality of teaching is consistently good or better.

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.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Howie
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- For the Secretary of State use the following email address:
CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The lead and team inspectors.

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 fourth monitoring inspection on 10–11 March 2015

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the interim associate headteacher, the senior leadership team, four members of the interim executive board (IEB), the consultant headteacher who is working in the primary phase, and one representative from the local authority. Inspectors also spoke to pupils informally around the school and in classrooms, and to a group of pupils selected by the school. In addition, inspectors spoke to parents at the end of the school day. Inspectors visited lessons and scrutinised school documents, including those relating to safeguarding, recruitment, behaviour, attendance and the checks made on the quality of teaching.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in December, two members of staff have left the school and nine new members have been appointed. Two of the assistant headteachers who were previously temporary have now been made permanent appointments. Two new assistant headteachers have been appointed. In addition, a deputy headteacher with responsibility for the primary phase has been appointed to start in July. Members of staff from Calthorpe School continue to support staff at Al-Hijrah. Several staff members from Calthorpe are filling senior leadership posts on a temporary basis. A consultant headteacher has been contracted to work one day each week in the primary phase. Two members of staff are on long-term sick leave.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement in the secondary phase remains stronger than that seen in primary. Evidence from the school's tracking system and from the work in pupils' books show that the results seen at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2014 are likely to be improved upon this year. Mathematics is set to remain the stronger subject. Recent assessments show that, as reported at the last inspection, while there is still an attainment gap between girls, who perform better, and boys, it is narrowing. Achievement in humanities, design technology, art and physical education, identified as weak in 2014, is improving.

Children in the early years are starting to make better progress than in the past. This is as a result of improvements in the learning environment and in the quality of teaching.

A tracking system has been introduced for progress in the primary phase. This means that leaders are now able to track the progress made by groups and cohorts of pupils. This information, combined with work in pupils' books, shows that an above-average proportion of pupils are likely to achieve the expected level in

reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1. Attainment at the higher Level 3, however, is likely to be less strong and is predicted to be below the national average.

Achievement in Key Stage 2 is a cause for concern. Without more rapid action, the three-year declining trend in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected levels in reading and writing at the end of Year 6 reported at the last inspection, is likely to continue. The progress made by pupils is too variable between subjects and classes. This is as a result of instability in staffing and variability in the quality of teaching.

The school provided inspectors with contradictory evidence relating to the progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational. However, evidence from pupils' books indicates that progress for this group of pupils remains too variable.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching continues to improve, with an increasing proportion of teaching that is good. However, the inconsistencies between classes and subjects reported at the last inspection remain. Teaching in the primary phase, while improving, particularly in the early years and Key Stage 1, is weaker than in the secondary phase.

Provision for children in the early years is much improved since the last inspection. An additional and more accessible outdoor area has been created, and new resources for both indoor and outdoor learning have been purchased. Staff have benefited from visits to other settings and also from coaching from senior leaders and external consultants. The layout of the learning areas has been reorganised to ensure that there is provision for all the required areas of learning. Pupils have free access to the outdoor area and between the two classrooms. Consequently, children are now able to make independent choices about their learning activities. There is still insufficient challenge for the most-able children.

As a result of training, teachers across the school are asking pupils more probing questions, and expect longer and better thought-out answers. This helps pupils to make better progress. For example, in a Year 1 mathematics lesson, pupils were asked questions such as, 'Which one is right? How do you know? Can you prove it?' Where teaching is most effective in the secondary phase, teachers ask targeted questions to specific students and do not rely on volunteers. This ensures that all students remain focused and concentrate.

Teaching assistants are being deployed in a more focused and productive way. Where teaching is most effective, the teacher ensures that they understand what pupils should achieve and are actively engaged with pupils' learning throughout the lesson.

The quality of marking is variable across the school. This is, in part, because the marking policy does not give teachers enough guidance on how to provide pupils with helpful advice. In the best examples, teachers provide comments that require a response, either to improve the work that has been already been completed or to tackle a 'next step' task to move their learning forward. Progress is maximised when teachers check that the pupils have responded accurately. Particularly good marking was seen in Year 4 and in the workbooks of Year 6 girls.

In the primary phase, pupils are not always challenged sufficiently. This was particularly noticeable in mathematics, both within year groups and between them. Pupils do not build on what they already know and sometimes have to repeat tasks. In contrast, in the secondary departments, the lower ability students are often given work that is too challenging and this limits the progress that they make. For example, in a Year 9 English lesson, the students were unfamiliar with some of the vocabulary that they were expected to use. The teacher did not check this sufficiently carefully and then moved them on to new learning before they were ready.

Where teaching is most effective, pupils understand the purpose of the lesson, they have appropriate and interesting resources to use, expectations are high and teachers make regular checks on the learning and move pupils on to harder work at the right time. In contrast, teaching is less effective when activities do not build effectively on what pupils already know or when the teaching does not capture the interest and engagement of the pupils.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour continues to improve. School records, which are thoroughly analysed, show that the incidences of 'red cards' continue to reduce. The vast majority of staff who responded to the questionnaire agree that behaviour is managed well. Leaders have established a calm and purposeful environment where expectations of behaviour are clear and are based on mutual respect. Pupils move around the school sensibly, although, on occasion in the secondary phase, there is a lack of urgency to get to the next lesson, particularly among boys. Pupils, most noticeably in the primary phase, are friendly and keen to talk about their school. All pupils who spoke to inspectors said they feel safe in school and trust adults to deal with any difficulties that arise. Younger pupils told inspectors that they enjoy coming to school because 'lessons are now more interesting'.

In general, pupils' attitudes to learning are good. Where attention wanders in lessons, it is when teaching fails to fully motivate and engage pupils or when tasks are not pitched at the right level of difficulty.

Attendance has improved. The number of pupils who are regularly absent is reducing. The family liaison officer pursues absences rigorously and this is having a

positive impact. As a result of a united approach across the school, punctuality is also improving.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The executive headteacher and associate headteacher continue to provide clear, decisive and determined leadership to the school. The capacity and stability of the leadership team has been improved with the appointment of four permanent assistant headteachers. The process of appointing a substantive headteacher has begun. However, several of the key leadership positions are held, on a temporary basis, by staff members from Calthorpe School and consultants. As a result, the long-term stability of the school leadership, while improving, remains fragile.

While substantial progress has been made since the last monitoring inspection, there is much ground to cover if the school is to be removed from special measures within the allotted timescale. Leaders are aware of this and have an accurate view of the progress that the school is making. Areas for improvement are tackled robustly and with an appropriate sense of urgency. The vision for the school is clear and is understood by most staff. Staff morale is improving, as demonstrated by the positive responses by the majority of staff in the Ofsted questionnaire.

Checks on the quality of teaching remain regular. Where teaching requires improvement, individual support and training are provided. These are proving to be effective. Records of the checks made on the quality of teaching have improved and judgements of teaching over time are now made on a wider range of evidence than in the past. However, the checks made on teaching do not always mirror the priorities set out in the school improvement plan. In addition, the improvement plan does not currently include clear and measurable milestones for each priority. This makes it difficult for the interim executive board members to hold leaders to account for the amount of progress being made.

The processes for recruitment are appropriate and transparent. The system for recording the checks made on staff now complies with current regulations. A safeguarding audit has been conducted and, as a result of the findings, an appropriate action plan is in place. Staff have not yet read the most up-to-date guidance about keeping pupils safe. This should be addressed.

In the primary phase, the topic-based curriculum continues to be effectively developed. Drama and sound studies (music) have been added to the timetable. The teaching of religious education has been introduced, based on the Birmingham agreed syllabus, and a religious education subject leader has been appointed. Pupils are being introduced to a broader range of faiths than was previously the case. This is still in its infancy and leaders are aware that teachers will need some additional training in order to deliver this subject confidently. After consultation with students,

option choices at Key Stage 4 have been broadened to include a wider range of subjects, including business studies and Mandarin.

Leaders ensure equality of opportunity for all pupils, including those with disabilities and special educational needs, and discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. However, the schools' current policy for equal opportunities does not reflect this practice and does not comply with current regulations.

Members of the interim executive board are knowledgeable about the issues facing the school and are working diligently to provide leaders with a high level of support and challenge. They work efficiently with the local authority and are proactive in contacting other agencies; for instance, the Department of Education, to seek solutions for the complex challenges facing the school. Some of the work is reliant on the decisions of other agencies and progress in some areas is slow. The work of the interim executive board on these issues, including those related to buildings and finance, enables senior leaders to focus on improving the outcomes for the pupils in the school. However, as a result of the complexities around this school, the interim executive board have not sufficiently focused on the progress of pupils.

The local authority and the interim executive board recognise the need to appoint permanent leaders and are pursuing this with appropriate urgency. Together, they continue to follow up the financial irregularities and staffing issues that were discovered during the audit of the deficit budget. Some of these issues are ongoing but appropriate measures are in place to ensure that they are resolved as quickly as possible. The interim executive board and local authority are working effectively together to ensure that the school can run on a balanced in-year budget as soon as possible. The uncertainty around the rental agreement with the Al Hijrah Trust for the current and future use of the school buildings remains a concern. However, there is ongoing liaison with the Charity Commission to find a resolution.

External support

The local authority continues to provide a high level of effective support. A 'cross-cutting' group has been established to enable regular meetings of all departments working on resolving the complex and sensitive issues associated with this school. This is ensuring that communication between departments is effective and actions are coordinated. The local authority adviser provides appropriate support and attends interim executive board meetings. However, written reports from the local authority do not identify clearly whether the school is making sufficient progress. The executive headteacher, brokered by the local authority, is effective in his role.

The support provided by senior leaders from Calthorpe School continues to be effective and well targeted. The systems that they have introduced are having a positive impact on the school. Similarly, effective support is being provided by the consultant headteacher in the primary phase.