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Maz Howes
Acting Headteacher
Highfield Junior and Infant School
Highfield Road
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Dear Ms Howes

Special measures monitoring inspection of Highfield Junior and Infant School

Following my visit with Ann Glynne-Jones and Dennis Brittain, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 29–30 April 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2014. 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 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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Howie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in September 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching to good or better so that pupils' progress accelerates and their behaviour improves by ensuring that:
 - teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment are consistently accurate all adults have high expectations of what pupils, especially the most able, can achieve
 - teachers use their assessments to plan and provide interesting and challenging activities that build on what pupils already know, understand and can do
 - all teachers use marking to correct misunderstandings and give pupils' clear guidance so that they know what they need to improve
 - teaching assistants are clear about their role in lessons and the purpose of each activity
 - there is a clear and consistent approach to the teaching of reading, including phonics (the sounds that letters make), and that pupils are given reading books which match their reading ability
 - teachers place greater focus on teaching mental calculation strategies and use correct vocabulary and clear explanations and examples when teaching mathematics so that pupils make rapid progress.

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that leaders at all levels:
 - rigorously check and evaluate how well the school is doing and use the findings to produce plans for improvement which are sharply focused on improving teaching in order to accelerate pupils' progress and raise attainment
 - make prompt and regular checks to ensure that planned improvement strategies are being implemented in every classroom
 - have a thorough understanding of the requirements of the new primary curriculum and develop a school curriculum which meets these requirements as well as the particular needs of the school community.

- Improve safeguarding arrangements as a matter of urgency by ensuring that:
 - all the appropriate checks are made and recorded when new staff and volunteers are recruited
 - detailed and secure records are kept of any concerns raised by pupils, parents or staff about a pupil's safety or well-being (in line with statutory guidance and advice from the local safeguarding children's board)
 - the safeguarding policy is updated to reflect current statutory guidance and in particular, to include information about the school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe from extremism and radicalisation.

The local authority should take urgent action to disband the governing body and put an interim executive board in place to ensure that the responsibilities and functions of governors can be fulfilled.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 29–30 April 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with you and the senior leadership team, year group leaders, the person responsible for monitoring attendance, two representatives from the support school, a representative of the local authority and the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB). Inspectors spoke to pupils in classrooms and around the school at break times and lunchtimes.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, there have been a number of changes in staffing. Five teachers have left the school, four teachers are on maternity leave and one teacher is on long-term sick leave. The majority of these vacancies are filled by supply teachers. Despite your best efforts, you have been unable to recruit permanent teachers. In addition, the headteacher has been absent since May 2014. You have been in the role of acting headteacher since January 2015.

The governing body was removed in March 2015 and an interim executive board put in place to oversee the work of the school.

Highfield is receiving support from Leigh Primary School, which has been brokered by the local authority through the Colmore Teaching School Alliance.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' achievement although improving, varies considerably across the school. This is because there are variations in the quality of teaching between classes and year groups. In addition, there have been significant disruptions to staffing in some year groups, with some classes having had two or more changes in teacher since September 2014.

Evidence in pupils' workbooks and the school's data about current Year 6 pupils show that the proportion of pupils on track to achieve the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of the year is below that seen last year. This is particularly so in mathematics. Standards are set to remain well below the national average. Improvements for these pupils have been at best, too slow and at worst, ineffective.

Recent reading tests identified that over half of the pupils in Years 2 to 6 are at least six months behind where they should be. In order to address this, training has been provided for staff and new reading books have been purchased. As a result of improvements in the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make), younger

pupils are making better progress in developing their early reading skills. Consequently, an increasing proportion of pupils are on track to meet the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check this year. Some of the lower ability pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 lack the phonic knowledge to be able to approach new words confidently and decode them independently.

Progress in mathematics continues to be hampered by weaknesses in pupils' ability to calculate mentally. Improvements are evident in some classes; however, these are not widespread or consistent enough to accelerate progress sufficiently for pupils to catch up with their peers in other schools.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching across the school is highly inconsistent, with teaching overtime varying from inadequate to good. This is, in part, because there has been a high turnover of staff. However, some recent improvements are evident. This is as a result of you having a more strategic view of the school, and the range of training activities and support that has been provided for staff.

Teaching assistants are being deployed more effectively in most classes. This is because they are well briefed by the teacher and understand what pupils should achieve by the end of the lesson. However, this is not yet a consistent feature of teaching in all classes. Where improvement is needed, teaching assistants are not deployed effectively enough at the beginning of lessons.

The teaching of phonics has improved. There is a consistent approach being used by all staff involved in phonics teaching. As a result of training, the subject knowledge of staff is improving. Recent checks on the phonic knowledge of pupils in Years 2 and 3 have resulted in additional support being provided to pupils who have fallen behind.

Classroom displays – for example, the English and mathematics 'working walls' – have improved and provide pupils with useful prompts and ideas to help them with their work. However, in some classrooms, the surfaces around the displays are cluttered with unnecessary items that obscure the displays and cause a distraction for pupils.

In many classes, pupils' workbooks show a lack of expectation from the teacher and a lack of pride from the pupils. For example, some English books in Year 6 have graffiti on them, are not marked regularly, have pages missed out and show that little work is completed during each lesson. In many year groups, there is no evidence that pupils are taught a consistent style of handwriting and, as a result, much work is untidy and poorly presented. In contrast, in some Year 2 classes where teachers have high expectations, pupils present their work neatly, consistently and take pride in their presentation. A good amount of work is completed in the time

given. Similar inconsistencies are evident in teachers' marking. Where marking conforms to the recently updated school policy, it has a positive impact on pupils' work and improvements are evident. However, many teachers are not adhering to the policy. As a result, pupils do not know how well they have done or if they have any errors to correct or improvements to make.

All teachers understand your expectation that pupils should understand the purpose of each lesson. Some are not yet as skilled as others in explaining this to pupils. In some classes, the objective of the lesson is clear and precise, but in others it is too confusing and does not use the correct vocabulary associated with the subject being taught.

Workbooks show that pupils are provided with a range of opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of grammar and punctuation. Some teachers encourage pupils to correct their spellings. However, pupils have too few opportunities to apply these skills in longer pieces of writing and this prevents them from making as much progress as they could. You have recognised this and have recently introduced a new writing workbook.

There is evidence of consistent and improving practice, notably in the Reception classes and also in some classes in Years 2, 3 and 4. Where teaching is most effective, the purpose of the lesson is clear, the work is matched to the different ability groups in the class, and adults have high expectations of what the pupils can achieve. For example, in a Year 2 mathematics lesson observed during the inspection, the teacher gave the pupils precise instructions on how to complete some calculations and then demonstrated clearly how to do it. The teacher had prepared a range of activities to enable the pupils to show what they had learned, and quickly moved pupils on to harder work as soon as they were able. As a result, the pupils made good progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils continue to behave well at lunchtimes and playtimes. During the inspection, pupils were polite and keen to talk to inspectors. Behaviour in lessons varies. In some classes pupils chat and move about the classroom needlessly, and this is not picked up by the teacher. In others, pupils push and shove one another when they line up, and this also goes unchecked. In contrast, pupils in some classes told inspectors that they were expected to get on with their work, listen to the teacher and could only chat about their learning. Leaders have begun a new system of recording poor behaviour and older records have not been kept. As a result, it is not possible to judge whether or not behaviour is improving.

The school's work to keep children safe has improved. Any concerns that are raised about pupils' safety or well-being are recorded and appropriate follow-up actions are

taken. On occasion, however, incidents are not followed up as quickly as they could be.

Procedures for tracking and following up pupils' absence are thorough. Groups of pupils are tracked to ensure that there are no variations in attendance rates. The school quite rightly does not authorise holidays during term time; however, in March alone, 27 families took unauthorised holidays. This has an impact on the school's overall attendance level, which remains below average. Lateness is also tracked and followed up appropriately. Although information is kept on a week-by-week basis, it is not analysed to see if lateness is decreasing as a result of the actions that are being taken.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Formal arrangements for you take on the role of acting headteacher in January have enabled you to take a more strategic view of the school. This has ensured that you and the assistant headteachers have a good understanding of the weaknesses that need to be addressed. However, your capacity to make and measure improvements is limited by two factors. Firstly, the vacated role of deputy headteacher remains unfilled. Secondly, the roles of the assistant headteachers and the year group leaders are not sufficiently well defined to enable you to hold them to account for the work that they are undertaking. For example, there several leaders with responsibilities for Year 6 but it is unclear precisely who is accountable for each area of improvement.

Since the last inspection, you have improved the action plan by being more precise about when your checks on teaching will be made. While this has been helpful, the checks are not yet closely enough matched with the improvement actions you are taking. For example, you rightly recognised that marking is an area that needs to improve and you introduced a helpful policy to make it clear what is expected. However, you have not checked rigorously or quickly enough if this has been implemented by all staff. As a result, marking remains inconsistent.

Nevertheless, an increased number of checks are being made on the quality of teaching. You and the assistant headteachers accurately identify the strengths and areas for improvement when you observe teaching. This is helping you to gain a view about how to prioritise support. However, too little attention is paid to the work in pupils' books and some judgements about the quality of teaching are overgenerous.

Year group leaders and the teachers with responsibility for English and mathematics have benefited from the support and coaching they have received. The decision to enable year groups to plan together has been effective in improving the communication within year group teams and has enabled the year leaders to have a more direct impact on their teams. Some of the year group leaders have provided

helpful support and guidance for their colleagues and have taken appropriate steps to help supply teachers to settle quickly into school routines. The mathematics and English leaders are providing useful training for staff to help them to improve their practice. Their work has been most successful when they have followed up the training with checks on the quality of teaching and have provided further guidance for staff.

School documentation shows that the curriculum has been appropriately adapted to meet the new requirements. An external consultant is providing support to ensure that the computing curriculum, including the teaching of e-safety, is well planned.

You have been rigorous in ensuring that systems are in place to make the appropriate checks on new staff as they are appointed. The updated safeguarding policy contains the relevant information. Staff who spoke to inspectors understand the procedures to follow if they have any concerns relating to a child's safety or well-being.

Since the last monitoring inspection, the governing body has been disbanded and an interim executive board put in place at the end of March. In a short space of time, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board has developed a good understanding of the issues facing this school and is under no illusion about the scale of the task ahead. He is ensuring that the members of the interim executive board have an appropriate range of skills to meet the needs of this school. He has quickly started to deal with some complex staffing issues and has planned to work with the acting headteacher to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of all leaders in the school are clear. He demonstrates an appropriate sense of urgency to ensuring pupils make better progress than in the past.

External support

The local authority has provided the school with a range of appropriate support related to staffing, safeguarding and governance. It has been effective in establishing an interim executive board and removing the previous governing body. Regular 'task force' meetings are held to discuss the improvements that the school is making. The local authority commissioned a review of teaching and learning, which identified some helpful next steps.

In addition, the support school has provided a good range of support. You and the senior leaders have been supported in improving the action plan and undertaking 'learning walks'. Almost all teachers and teaching assistants have visited Leigh Primary school to observe good practice. In addition, staff have received training on effective classroom practice, the teaching of phonics, and the deployment of teaching assistants. Staff have also been supported in making more accurate assessments of writing.

The school is receiving a good range of external support. However, the structure for holding this school and the work of the support school to account lacks rigour. The written agreement with the support school states that a termly progress report should be submitted that indicates the progress being made and the level of support being provided. No such reports were made available to inspectors.