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Ruby Kundi
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Kundi

Special measures monitoring inspection of Highfields Junior and Infant School

Following my visit with Michael Onyon and Diana Pearce, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 1 and 2 December, 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 third 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:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint two newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection subject to them being supported and mentored by staff at the support school.

This letter and the 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 third monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 December 2015.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with you and the senior leadership team, the teacher in charge of phonics (the sounds that letters make) and two representatives of the Birmingham Education Partnership, who are acting on behalf of the local authority. They met with four representatives from the support school, including the executive headteacher. A telephone call was made to the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB). Inspectors observed pupils during lunchtimes and spoke to parents at the end of the school day.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, there have been a number of staffing changes. The headteacher returned to school in June and the acting headteacher returned to her role as deputy headteacher. One assistant headteacher retired in July and another is absent due to illness. Three staff are on maternity leave, one of whom is the Key Stage 2 literacy leader and one is the Year 4 manager. These leaders have not yet been replaced. There are currently nine teaching vacancies. These are being covered by long-term supply teachers, five of whom have changed since September. The Chair of the Interim Executive Board resigned in June and a new chair was appointed in July. Additional members have been appointed to the IEB.

Since September, the school has been receiving support from the Prince Albert Community Trust.

The school is due to become a sponsored academy on 1 February 2016. The sponsor is Prince Albert Community Trust.

Outcomes for pupils

The initial improvement in the rate of pupils' progress noted at the last inspection has not been sustained. This is because the quality of teaching over time has declined in some classes. Some pupils have experienced several changes in teacher over short periods of time. As a result, a significant number of pupils in all year groups remain below the standards expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. They are not making sufficient progress to catch up with their peers in other schools.

Some improvements are evident. In Year 6, the rate of pupils' progress in mathematics and writing has improved. Two extra teachers have been appointed to provide support in these subjects and enable pupils to be taught in smaller groups. Staff from the support school have provided guidance with planning. This is having a positive impact on pupils' progress. Children are making better progress in early

years. This is because teachers have reorganised the way they teach and provide children with more varied play opportunities.

The teaching of phonics continues to improve steadily and an increasing proportion of pupils reached the expected standard in the most recent Year 1 phonics check. This is because there is a more consistent and regular approach to teaching early reading, and adults are developing their skills and expertise in this area. However, there is still work to be done to ensure that more pupils reach the standard expected in Year 1.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment overall has declined since the last inspection, notably in Years 3, 4 and 5. There is a greater proportion of teaching over time that is inadequate. This is, in part, as a result of a high turnover of staff and the difficulties experienced by the school leaders in recruiting permanent teachers.

The strategies that are used by some teachers to maintain an orderly environment are weak and ineffective, and in some cases inappropriate. Inspectors observed teachers using sarcasm and shouting inappropriately at pupils to maintain discipline. This is leading to chaotic and unsettled classrooms where effective learning cannot take place. This also undermines the mutual respect between adults and pupils that was previously in evidence.

All teachers understand the need to provide pupils with work that suits their different abilities. However, many teachers are not yet taking into consideration what pupils already know and can do. This results in pupils having to complete work that is either too easy or too difficult or having to repeat work that has previously been completed. This is particularly the case in mathematics.

All teachers are now using the school's agreed approach to marking pupils' written work. Pupils are provided with positive comments and some advice on how to improve or correct their work. Where this is most effective, the advice is clear and precise and results in subsequent pieces of work being more accurate or of higher quality. The quality of the advice is not yet consistent.

There is a regular and consistent approach in place to teach phonics. This is leading to pupils making better progress than in the past. There is still work to be done to ensure that all adults consistently demonstrate sounds carefully and precisely and give pupils frequent opportunities to listen to the sounds, practise saying, reading and writing them. The very short phonics lessons in Year 1 do not provide enough time for adults to ensure learning can be developed fully.

Where teaching and learning is most effective, teachers choose resources and activities to interest and motivate pupils. They have high expectations of behaviour and plan work that builds on what pupils have done before. They scan the classroom during lessons to ensure that all pupils are busy and are concentrating and they know when pupils can be moved on to harder work.

As a result of visiting the support school and working with staff there, adults have reorganised teaching and learning in the early years. Activities are developed according to the children's interests and children have more opportunities to learn outside. Significantly more activities and resources have been made available for children to choose from. This has created a more vibrant and stimulating area for children to learn and play in, and is enabling children to make better progress than in the past. The staff are motivated and are keen to improve provision further.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour has deteriorated since the last inspection. Pupils' respect for adults has diminished and not all adults follow the school's behaviour policy to reinforce high expectations. This is, in part, because some teachers only take responsibility for the behaviour of the pupils that they are directly responsible for. If inappropriate behaviour is exhibited by a child from another class in the corridors or the playground, it is not dealt with. There is no corporate responsibility for behaviour. This is leading to a deterioration of expectations and, as a result, behaviour.

During the inspection, behaviour in the lunch hall was poor. Older pupils shouted at one another across the hall, disrespected property and spoke rudely to lunchtime staff. Pupils confirmed that lunchtimes 'are often like this, unless the deputy headteacher is in here'.

Behaviour in some classrooms is poor, notably in Year 4 and some classes in Year 5, where pupils spent considerable periods of time not concentrating on their work, chatting and gazing around the classroom. These classrooms are not purposeful and the noise level is not conducive to successful learning. Adults used ineffective methods to encourage calm and order. Pupils told inspectors, 'it's difficult to concentrate because everyone is so loud' and 'no-one notices if we are not doing our best'.

Despite this, pupils behave well for some members of staff. They listen carefully, respond to instructions quickly and feel proud of the praise they receive.

Attendance remains below the national average for primary schools. Although absences are followed up with telephone calls and home visits, some parents remain unconcerned about their children having time off school. At present there are no consequences in place for parents who frequently keep their children at home. Leaders have recently adopted the 'Spotlight' attendance scheme, which aims to

address this issue more thoroughly. Pupils' lateness also continues to be an issue that the school leaders need to address.

The school's work to keep pupils safe is improving but remains inconsistent in some areas. Leaders are good at checking that pupils who leave the school have registered at another school or that their destination is known. Concerns about pupils' safety and welfare are recorded and stored securely. However, there is insufficient detail in some of the records about the concerns that have been raised. Additionally, in some pupils' files it is not easy to track the outcomes of telephone calls or emails that have been made. Adults have become more vigilant in their work to identify pupils vulnerable to harm. This has been due to additional training and advice from the support school. As a result, the number of concerns that have been reported has increased.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The capacity for you to make and measure improvements has been limited by a reduction in the size of the leadership team. This is as a result of leaders leaving or being absent from their role. In addition, the drive and determination to ensure the school is removed from special measures that I have seen in previous inspections was not as evident during this inspection. Together, these factors have resulted in too little progress being made towards the removal of special measures.

Teaching, learning and assessment have not improved sufficiently since the last monitoring inspection and, worryingly, behaviour has declined. You have not acted swiftly or decisively enough to identify and address these issues.

You and the senior leaders have made regular checks to ensure that teachers are sticking to the agreed policy for marking. You have correctly identified where practice is strong and have provided useful feedback where practice is weak. As a result, there is a degree of consistency evident in the way pupils receive feedback about their work. This degree of rigour has not been evident in the other checks that you make on the quality of teaching. Consequently, the quality of teaching remains highly inconsistent.

School documentation shows that the curriculum has been updated to meet the new requirements. As yet, pupils have not completed the work that has been planned in each subject due to a focus on developing basic skills in English and mathematics.

The deputy headteacher provides essential stability within the school. However, her remit is too wide for her to be fully effective in her role.

Since the previous inspection, the IEB has been expanded and has a new chair. She has quickly gained an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and is realistic about the scale of the task ahead. Her view of the school's progress

mirrors the view of the inspection team. The IEB meets frequently and is providing leaders with an appropriate level of challenge and support. The IEB is also ensuring that the support school is held accountable for the work its leaders are undertaking within the school, and is working effectively towards the transfer of the school to sponsored academy status.

External support

Since September, the Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) has been commissioned by the local authority to make checks on the progress that the school is making towards the removal of special measures. The advisers have a clear understanding of the issues facing the school but, as yet, no formal meeting has taken place to make judgements about how well the school is progressing.

The support school has conducted thorough audits of several areas of the school's work and has gained a clear and accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses. As a result of well thought out and carefully implemented support, improvements are evident in the quality of teaching in the early years and in Year 6. In addition, where teaching remains stubbornly inadequate, appropriate plans are now in place to address this.

On occasion, there has been an overlap between the work of the support school to help school leaders to make improvements and the preparations for the support school to become the academy sponsor. It is important that there is a clear distinction between these two issues.

Only in exceptional circumstances, where they are crucial to the school's future success, should priorities for further improvement be added.

- Leaders should take urgent action to ensure that all teachers use appropriate strategies to maintain a purposeful working environment in the classrooms and develop relationships based on mutual respect.