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Ms Jill Bennett
Acting Headteacher
Priory Primary School
Limes Road
Priory Estate
Dudley
DY1 4AQ

Dear Ms Bennett

Special measures monitoring inspection of Priory Primary School

Following my visit with Tracey Kneale, Additional Inspector, to your school on 5–6 December 2012, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in July 2012. 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 not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Dudley.

Yours sincerely

Mark Sims
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2012

- Improve teaching and accelerate the progress made by all pupils in order to raise attainment in all year groups by:
 - ensuring that there is a systematic approach to teaching skills in reading, writing and mathematics, and by providing regular opportunities for pupils to use and apply these skills across the curriculum
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can do and ensuring that lesson activities are engaging and well-matched to the needs of pupils
 - ensuring that marking tells pupils what they need to do to improve and that pupils are given sufficient opportunities to respond to the advice given
 - using support staff effectively to help pupils learn.

- Improve pupils' behaviour and safety by:
 - ensuring that information about pupils' disabilities and special educational needs is reviewed and shared appropriately so that their needs are planned for and met
 - improving attendance
 - ensuring that actions taken to improve the conduct of pupils who frequently misbehave are sufficiently rigorous to significantly reduce instances of poor behaviour
 - providing a range of play equipment and constructive activities at breaks and lunchtimes
 - promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by giving them more opportunities to enjoy, explore and learn about different cultures and the arts.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management in order to secure rapid improvement by:
 - putting into place, with immediate effect, suitable arrangements to ensure that all staff use the correct procedures to prioritise and record cases where safeguarding concerns are identified
 - sharpening the monitoring and evaluation skills of all leaders and managers
 - ensuring that the governing body holds leaders to account.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 5–6 December 2012

Evidence

The inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, acting headteacher, associate headteacher, senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, a representative from the local authority, and members of staff and groups of pupils. The monitoring inspection focused on the improvement issues identified at the last inspection.

Context

Since the last inspection, the headteacher has resigned and been replaced by the deputy headteacher as acting headteacher. Two assistant headteachers have been seconded to work with the school. A national leader for education and a senior leader have continued to work with Priory as executive and associate headteacher respectively. The governing body has been disbanded and very recently replaced with an interim executive board.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement is very low throughout the school. Pupils join the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage starting points that are well below what is typical for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards remain very low into Key Stage 1 and through to the end of Key Stage 2, particularly in writing. In recent test results in English and mathematics, attainment was well below the national average. With the exception of Year 2, all groups of pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, are not making sufficient progress in lessons in order to narrow the wide gap in attainment before they leave school. Pupils do not have sufficient basic skills in literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology to apply to other areas of their learning. Expectations for their rate of progress are too low and work is not pitched at the right level in order for pupils to do as well as they should.

The quality of teaching

There has been little improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection. In too many lessons throughout the school teaching is characterised by a lack of challenge for more-able pupils and over-dependency on additional support for less-able pupils. There are gaps in teachers' subject knowledge. Too much of the time is spent with teachers talking to the whole class together. Despite remaining weaknesses in teaching, the behaviour of pupils and their attitudes to learning are often good because all teachers are consistently applying the school's new policy for behaviour.

In the small minority of lessons where teaching is good, learning moves at a brisk pace and teachers are constantly checking pupils' progress in order to move them on in their learning. All pupils in these lessons, whatever level they are working at, have sufficiently challenging work set for them and they are encouraged to work independently or in groups.

At times, marking shows pupils what they have achieved and how they could improve their work but, too often, it is restricted to praise or comments about presentation or work that is unfinished. Occasionally, teachers set pupils further written questions or challenges but these are not followed up by pupils or teachers. Some pupils do too much of their writing on mini-whiteboards which are then erased before the teacher can check it. Older pupils know their targets for English and mathematics but not always how they are going to achieve them.

In too many instances, teachers do not take enough responsibility for the management and deployment of teaching assistants. Their role is not sufficiently clear other than to work with the lowest attaining group or a specific individual. Too often they are assigned to help pupils complete tasks rather than support pupils' learning. There is little for them to do when the teacher is talking to the class, as they are not involved in recording pupils' responses.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

There has been a rapid transformation in the behaviour of pupils and their attitude in lessons. The introduction of the 'good to be green' behaviour strategy in the classroom has led to a very large reduction in the number of instances of poor behaviour. Leaders have taken a zero-tolerance approach to misbehaviour through a combination of tough sanctions, such as the 'cooler room', and rewards for good behaviour. Pupils love the rewards, which include extra play time and tea with the headteacher. Good behaviour is also celebrated through assemblies and certificates.

The introduction of play leaders and play equipment at break times and lunchtime has ensured that the playground is not just a safe place to be but fun too. All members of the school community, including mid-day supervisors and pupils, were unanimous that this is a prime cause of the significant improvement in behaviour. Pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance is improving.

The school has successfully reduced the number of pupils on the special educational needs register through reviewing its criteria for identification. Less progress has been made on meeting pupils' individual targets in lessons. Little work has been done to ensure that the curriculum reflects pupils own real-life experiences or gives them the opportunity to learn more about diversity in the United Kingdom and the wider world. There is very little evidence of pupils' own work on display in classrooms or around the school. Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to participate in assemblies.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The acting headteacher and senior leaders have been highly successful in tackling behaviour as the school's number one priority and have addressed all safeguarding concerns raised during the last inspection. There is a unity of purpose which has engaged the whole school community, including parents.

The school has made less progress in tackling inadequacies in teaching or raising achievement. A number of uncertainties remain about the future direction and leadership of the school as all but one of the senior leaders are externally employed. Under the current leadership structure, it has limited capacity to improve further.

Senior leaders know the challenges and areas for improvement well. Their monitoring and evaluation of where the school is at are accurate, as are judgements about the quality of teaching. Although support and modelling of teaching have been introduced, it is too early to see their impact. There are too few instances of good teaching to share good practice from within the school. The role of the phase leaders in monitoring and evaluating teaching and other areas of leadership and management is underdeveloped.

Systems for tracking pupils' achievement are now in place. Although termly progress meetings have been held, this process has only just started so it is too early to see the impact of teachers being held to account for the achievement of pupils in their classes. There is too little monitoring of the work of teaching assistants and the support work to help pupils to catch up. The number of recorded behaviour incidents is tracked by class and trends are identified, but the school is not tracking incidents by pupil groups.

The plan to raise achievement is too lengthy for leaders to use as a tool to focus and prioritise the next key areas for development. The governing body has been very recently replaced by an interim executive board which is experienced, knowledgeable and highly supportive of the acting headteacher. Its members have accurately described her as 'determined, dedicated and capable'. It is too early to see the impact of the interim executive board's work in the school as it has only just been appointed.

External support

The local authority knows the strengths and weaknesses of the school well and is providing effective support. It quickly replaced the outgoing headteacher with the deputy headteacher as acting headteacher and was instrumental in replacing the governing body with the interim executive board. It has provided financial support through continuing the support from the national leader for education and associate headteacher. Its statement of action is fit for purpose, although it does not contain

sufficient milestones for reducing absenteeism and raising achievement. The acting headteacher is receiving good support for monitoring teaching from senior leaders who work at the national leader for education's school.