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Mrs Pamela Read-Law
Executive Headteacher
Harper Bell Seventh Day Adventist School
29 Ravenhurst Street
Camp Hill
Birmingham
B12 0EJ

Dear Mrs Read-Law

Special measures monitoring inspection of Harper Bell Seventh Day Adventist School

Following my visit to your school with Deana Holdaway HMI on 12 June 2013, 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 March 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, we held meetings with you in your capacity as the interim executive headteacher, the foundation governor, a representative of the local authority and staff responsible for behaviour and pastoral care. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plans were evaluated. Eight parts of lessons were observed in English and mathematics.

Context

The local authority recruited you as executive headteacher in May 2013 to lead and manage Harper Bell Primary School on a temporary basis. At the time of this monitoring inspection, you had been in post for four weeks. The headteacher was absent at the time of the monitoring inspection for personal reasons. He has resigned his post with effect from July 2013. You will continue to lead the school until a permanent replacement is appointed. As part of the local authority's support arrangement, a National Leader in Education (NLE) has continued to support senior

leaders. Other consultants have provided individual class teachers with support and training. The local authority has advised that Harper Bell Primary School should convert to academy status as soon as possible. The governing body is in the early stages of discussion with the Department for Education and the local authority regarding the best course of action for the school.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The local authority's statement of action has identified appropriate support to improve the quality of leadership, including governance, teaching, pupils' behaviour and to raise standards in mathematics. The impact of the support provided by the local authority, consultants and the NLE since the school was placed in special measures has been limited. Widespread underachievement remains across the school in reading, writing and mathematics because of poor and persistent weaknesses in teaching and a lack of clear direction from the headteacher and other senior leaders. The local authority took suitable action to strengthen leadership when it became apparent that insufficient action was being taken to bring about the required improvements with the necessary urgency.

The local authority's first target for improvement, to eradicate inadequate teaching, has not been met. The headteacher, governors, other senior leaders and teachers have been slow to change their practice. Staff with extra responsibility for subjects do not have the necessary skills to check the quality of teaching with sufficient detail or to help teachers become more effective.

A great number of actions have been planned since the school's previous inspection. However, the headteacher's and governors' plans for improvement are too complex. Actions lack precision, focus and measurable results so that it is hard to check how well progress is being made in tackling the deep-seated weaknesses.

In-depth reviews of teachers' work are not in place. As a consequence, there is insufficient focus of teachers' impact on pupils' learning. Current reviews of teaching and learning do not focus sufficiently on the impact of teachers on pupils' learning or identify the precise actions that need to be taken to improve individual aspects of teachers' work. Systems to keep a check on pupils' learning and progress in lessons and in their books are not secure. Teachers' expectations of pupils' capabilities are not high enough. Those who find learning easy complete their tasks quickly and are not given harder work to do, while those who find work difficult struggle to complete work and lose interest and misbehave. A review of pupils' English, mathematics, science and topic books shows that pupils do not have relevant opportunities to gain the necessary knowledge and skills in these subjects. Work is sometimes left unfinished and the activities given to pupils are rarely modified to suit their different

levels of ability. The presentation of pupils' work is poor, with teachers accepting mediocre effort. Written exercises are often unmarked and, where work is marked, it is frequently overly positive or incorrect, showing teachers' weak knowledge of grammar and punctuation. As a consequence, pupils repeat errors and make little progress.

Governance has not improved. Members of the governing body do not have a clear picture of the quality of teaching and learning across the school. They remain over reliant on the poor quality information provided by the headteacher and have not been gathering first-hand evidence of improvement. It is unacceptable that an external review of governance has not yet taken place, as recommended in the inspection of March 2013. The local authority should also consider making full use of its powers to strengthen the governance of the school.

In the short space of time since your appointment as executive headteacher, you have quickly identified a substantial proportion of inadequate teaching and none that is good. You have uncovered areas of weakness that were not apparent before. For example, the job descriptions of staff with extra responsibilities bear little relation to the work they actually do. Some staff do not have contracts of employment. Steps are being taken to start to put these matters right.

Systems are now being implemented to identify trends in attendance and punctuality and to tackle frequent absence quickly. You have introduced clear expectations of pupils' behaviour. Rewards and sanctions are beginning to be implemented by staff. However, incidents of unsafe play and boisterous behaviour go unnoticed by adults on duty on the playground. The school building presents limitations to overcoming health and safety issues. For example, toilet facilities in the Early Years Foundation Stage are some distance away from the classroom. The children are unable to regain entry to the classroom because the door handles are too high and remain unsupervised until their absence is noticed by an adult.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector