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27 June 2013

Patricia Davies
Interim Headteacher
Al-Furqan Primary School
Reddings Lane
Tyseley
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Dear Ms Davies

Special measures monitoring inspection of Al-Furqan Primary School

Following my visit with Rachel Howie, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 25-26 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 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 November 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

One newly qualified teacher may be appointed if guidance and support is 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

Usha Devi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching and ensure all pupils in Years 1 to 6 make good progress by ensuring teachers:
 - set work for pupils that is well matched to their abilities
 - have high expectations of how much pupils will learn in a lesson
 - mark books frequently and regularly in order to tell pupils how well they have done and what they need to do to improve
 - set and mark homework on a regular basis.

- Ensure all pupils are taught by teachers, rather than teaching assistants, for the great majority of their lessons in any given subject.

- Provide sufficient material resources, especially books, for pupils to be able to work on their own when required.

- Increase the rate at which the school improves by ensuring leaders and managers at all levels, including governors:
 - set suitably challenging targets for the school's improvement
 - analyse data to gain a full understanding of how pupils are performing, identify weaknesses in their performance and draw up suitable plans to improve
 - monitor teaching more rigorously to provide a clear picture of strengths and weaknesses that can be used to evaluate and manage teachers' performance and identify where further training is required.

- Improve communications with parents and carers so that their concerns can be heard and addressed and their trust in the school's leaders, including governors, can be restored.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 25–26 June 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the teachers with responsibilities for English, mathematics and different key stages, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority.

During this monitoring inspection, HMI spent just over three hours speaking with groups of parents and carers so that they could get a range of views from as many parents and carers as possible. On the first day of the inspection, HMI spoke to parents and carers after a class assembly. They also invited parents and carers to a meeting in the evening. Those who felt that they did not have an opportunity to express their views during this meeting were given the option to speak with HMI on the second day of the inspection. In addition to these opportunities, HMI spoke to parents and carers informally at the start of the second day of the inspection. HMI also asked senior leaders to arrange for a group of parents and carers to meet with them. HMI additionally took account of the 67 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View).

Context

The interim headteacher, who started working at the school in February 2013, is expected to continue working in the school until April 2014. The local authority replaced the governing body with an IEB in April 2013. The interim headteacher, in partnership with the IEB, has reviewed the roles and responsibilities of staff. All pupils are now taught by teachers for the majority of their lessons. Two teachers have recently taken on responsibility for leading and managing English and mathematics. Four teachers have taken on responsibility for supporting teachers in different key stages. The IEB has also appointed two assistant headteachers. They will both join the school in September 2014 and they will be responsible for helping pupils to make better progress and working with teachers to improve their practice. A permanent building service manager has been appointed. He will join the school in July. He will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the school premises. Six new classrooms are currently being built on the school site. Two of the new classrooms are now occupied by Year 3 pupils.

As part of the local authority support arrangements, senior leaders and teachers from a number of local schools have been working with senior leaders and teachers at Al-Furqan Primary.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' progress, as reflected in lesson observations and pupils' books, shows an improving picture, with some pupils now making good progress. In the majority of

classes, pupils make at least expected progress with some making faster progress. However, there are times, when pupils do not make enough progress. This is especially the case in Key Stage 2. Rates of progress differ across the school because of variations in the quality of teaching.

A teacher from a local secondary school has provided teachers with useful guidance on supporting the learning needs of pupils who need extra help. This has had a beneficial impact. The progress of this group of pupils is improving with many making the progress they should. In lessons, more-able pupils do not always make the progress of which they are capable because they are given activities that are too easy.

The proportion of pupils working at the standards expected for their age is rising, especially in reading and mathematics. Pupils' attainment in writing is rising, but remains low, especially in Years 3 and 4. Teachers are getting better at helping pupils' to write sentences that make sense and to use punctuation and grammar correctly. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise their writing skills appropriately in other subjects or to write at length.

Children in the Reception classes continue to make good progress with their reading and writing. Progress in different aspects of mathematics is variable. While pupils have good opportunities to learn about numbers, they do not always have the chance to sufficiently develop their knowledge of shapes, money and weights.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has significantly improved and, as a result, pupils are making better progress than in the past. Almost half of the teaching observed during this monitoring inspection was good or better. While there has been a marked reduction in the proportion of inadequate teaching since the November 2012 inspection, a small proportion of inadequate teaching remains in Key Stage 2.

Where teaching is most effective, teachers made sure that activities were interesting and well matched to the needs of pupils of different abilities. They ensured that lessons started quickly and pupils had sufficient time to learn on their own and work with other pupils. The pupils were also provided with a good range of equipment and information to help them while they worked. In one successful example, the teacher asked pupils to use their knowledge of numbers to find the best way of working out a mathematical problem about time. The teacher and teaching assistant asked questions which challenged pupils' thinking and encouraged pupils to explain why they had chosen a particular mathematical method to find the answer. They also continually checked pupils' learning during the lesson and provided immediate and helpful guidance so that pupils made rapid progress.

In the lessons where pupils made expected rather than good progress, teachers spent too long providing pupils with explanations about the activities. Occasionally teachers stopped the whole class unnecessarily in order to provide information that was not relevant to the different groups of pupils. As a consequence, the time available for pupils to complete their work was reduced. In a number of these lessons, the activities for the more-able pupils were not sufficiently challenging. In a few lessons in Key Stage 2, pupils made inadequate progress. This was because the activities were too easy for pupils and were uninspiring.

The quality of teaching in Reception remains good. Inspectors observed children thoroughly enjoying learning about mini-beasts in this year group while also developing their writing skills. 'I can tell you all about butterflies!', exclaimed one child. Activities for the youngest children in the school are well matched to children's different learning needs and are relevant to children's interests. Staff make effective use of the limited space available outside and ensure that children can explore and learn in the outdoors. Sometimes, teachers miss the chance to sufficiently develop children's skills and knowledge in all aspects of mathematics.

Teachers' marking is inconsistent and does not always provide pupils with clear guidance. In some classes, such as in Year 2, marking is helpful and identifies precisely what needs to be improved. Some teachers do not insist on high standards of presentation and allow pupils to scribble and to form letters and numbers incorrectly.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are polite and keen to talk about their work, but behaviour continues to require improvement. Teachers do not always provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to do their own research, take responsibility for their learning, be creative, or share their ideas with other pupils. This results in pupils sitting quietly and listening passively for long periods of time. Behaviour around school is variable. Pupils explained that during break times, a few pupils do not always behave as well as they should. They do not like it when some 'play-fight' or use 'rude words'. The pupils confirmed that adults in the school deal with such incidents quickly. Some pupils who spoke with inspectors are concerned that they do not have enough time for playing outside during lunchtime. HMI found that pupils' concerns about lunchtimes are well founded.

Senior leaders are using a range of appropriate rewards to encourage pupils to attend regularly. Despite this, attendance has dropped and is currently below the national average for primary schools. This is because there has been an increase in the number of families choosing to take their children on holiday during term time.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The interim headteacher is leading the school with determination. She has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and where further improvements are required. The interim headteacher is working effectively with the IEB and the local authority to tackle the significant weaknesses identified in the November 2012 inspection. Staff morale has improved. Teachers commented that they feel valued and they know what they need to do to help raise pupils' achievements.

With support from staff at a local primary school, senior leaders have checked the accuracy of the information they have about pupils' progress. The deputy headteacher is beginning to analyse this information and identify the pupils who are not making enough progress so that appropriate support can be provided. The interim headteacher has recently introduced meetings to discuss the progress of pupils with individual teachers. As a result of these discussions, teachers are identifying the precise actions they need to take to help different groups of pupils and change the way they teach in order to help pupils to make better progress.

The interim headteacher has improved the systems for checking the work of staff. She regularly observes teachers and provides them with helpful feedback. Each teacher has an action plan that identifies the aspects of their teaching that need to be improved. Once these aspects have been discussed, teachers are provided with appropriate training. This process is contributing to improvements in the quality of teaching. Senior leaders review pupils' work but not frequently enough. This is allowing inconsistencies to continue in the quality and quantity of work in pupils' books.

Suitable support from senior leaders from other schools is enabling the recently appointed middle leaders at Al-Furqan to improve their leadership skills. They have all started to identify the actions that need to be made in the subjects or year groups for which they are responsible.

The school improvement plan has been revised and is now fit for purpose. The actions in the plan are appropriate and it clearly states who will check that senior leaders are making enough of a difference to pupils' learning. The targets in the action plan are not always measurable.

The IEB has a secure understanding of the wide-ranging issues facing senior leaders. The Chair of the IEB provides the interim headteacher with an appropriate level of support and challenge. To ensure that the interim headteacher is able to focus her attention on helping pupils to make better progress, members of the IEB are working with local authority personnel to resolve matters related to staffing and the school premises. For instance, the IEB has acted promptly to help the interim headteacher ensure that teachers are paid correctly. Since the last monitoring inspection in February 2013, the IEB has worked with the local authority to complete

a detailed fire risk assessment. The school now meets the necessary requirements for keeping pupils safe in case of a fire. Currently, the IEB and a local authority officer are working together to resolve a number of complex issues relating to the school site. The members of the IEB are in the process of organising regular visits to the school so that they check how well pupils are learning for themselves.

This monitoring inspection has identified concerns about the time available for pupils to learn. Pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 are currently not taught for the number of hours that the government recommends. This is reducing the time teachers have to ensure that pupils receive their full curriculum entitlement. In some year groups, valuable learning time is being lost because teachers are not ensuring that the school day is effectively organised.

The majority of parents who have responded to the Ofsted online survey are happy with all aspects of the school. A small minority are less positive. Parents and carers who spoke with HMI during the inspection have mixed views about the school. Some parents and carers are very positive about the actions the interim headteacher and the IEB are taking. For instance, they appreciate the fortnightly newsletters that keep them up to date. They commented that the IEB is keeping them informed by posting their minutes on the school website. Some parents and carers told inspectors that the interim headteacher is approachable and listens to and follows up their concerns.

In contrast, some parents and carers are concerned about a number of issues, including communication, homework and the timeliness within which their concerns are dealt with. HMI have discussed these concerns with the interim headteacher, the Chair of the IEB and the local authority. In response to these concerns, the interim headteacher will produce a weekly newsletter. This will include a question and answer section that will respond to parent and carer queries and make clear the actions the school intends to take or has taken. The IEB will review the school's current complaints procedure and ensure that all parents and carers are made aware of the timescales within which their concerns will be resolved. Pupils who spoke with HMI told inspectors that they like the new approach to homework because it is 'interesting', 'fun' and it helps them to be 'independent'. Senior leaders acknowledge that they need to make sure that all teachers regularly check pupils' homework and ensure that it is completed on time.

Following discussions with the Department for Education, the IEB established a support group to ensure that parents and carers had a forum for sharing their views about the school. There is scope for extending the membership of this group so that the IEB are able to gather the views of parents and carers who do not always have the time to attend meetings organised by senior leaders.

External support

The local authority, in partnership with a number of local schools, is providing a good level of support. Following the previous monitoring inspection, the local authority acted swiftly and used its powers to deal with the weaknesses in governance. The local authority has arranged for a number of local schools to provide staff with appropriate training. This work has helped to significantly reduce the proportion of inadequate teaching. It has also contributed to better rates of progress in most classes.

HMI recommends that, as a matter of urgency, the interim headteacher, the IEB and the local authority work together to ensure that pupils in Key Stage 1 and 2 are taught for the number of hours suggested by the government.