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17 September 2013

Mr Max Vlahakis
The Interim Headteacher
Butts Primary School
Butts Road
Walsall
West Midlands
WS4 2AH

Dear Mr Vlahakis

Special measures monitoring inspection of Butts Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 17 September 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 May 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the interim headteachers and senior team, the Chair of the Governing Body and other representatives, and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, interim leadership of the school has been provided by the headteacher and two senior leaders from the nearby Alumwell Junior School. The substantive headteacher remains on sick leave. The governing body has been reconstituted and reduced in size to nine governors. One teacher has left and a new teacher has joined the school. The special educational needs coordinator now focuses on managing that aspect of provision and is no longer a class teacher.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The quality of action planning to ensure sustained improvement in school performance over time has key shortcomings. Nonetheless, the decisive action taken to improve the leadership of the school following the inspection is yielding some important successes. The local authority was quick to facilitate arrangements for the school to be led on an interim basis by your team, which has a strong track record of success at Alumwell Junior School. Your leadership has been well focused on redefining leadership responsibilities at all levels and establishing clear expectations for the performance of staff and their pupils.

Since the section 5 inspection, teachers have received precise feedback on how to improve performance through detailed lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work. This has been accompanied by a programme of training and professional development for teachers, aimed at promoting good practice. Meetings have been held between leaders and teachers to discuss the progress of individual pupils and to identify ways of tackling underachievement. Teachers' assessments of pupils' standards have been moderated, and a new system for tracking pupils' progress has been implemented to strengthen accountability. School monitoring records suggest that the quality of teaching has improved overall as a result of strengthened leadership of teaching, although too much still requires improvement. Unvalidated national test and assessment results for 2013 show some improvement in overall standards at the end of Key Stage 2, with sharp improvements in attainment at the higher Level 5 in reading and mathematics. However, pupils' achievement was weaker in writing, and you have rightly identified this as a key focus for further improvement.

The governing body has responded positively to the recommendations in the section 5 inspection report and the advice of the local authority. In particular, it has taken action to ensure that all governors are more fully informed about all aspects of school performance, by reducing the size of the governing body and moving the work of its former sub-committees into full governing body meetings. Governors have received training on the interpretation of performance data which will be followed up with further training on the school's new performance tracking system in the coming term.

Governors are well represented in the monthly progress review group (PRG) meetings with senior leaders and local authority representatives which monitors the improvement of the school against the key recommendations of the section 5 inspection report. The record of this forum, however, is insufficiently evaluative, as it largely summarises actions taken and successes achieved rather than appraising the strengths and weaknesses of progress made against expected outcomes. This shortcoming is linked to a lack of clarity in the school's improvement plan. In particular, the criteria for judging the success of planned actions are not always

sharply defined or measurable enough to support the precise evaluation of progress. In both the school action plan and the local authority statement of action, the timescale set for the school's exit from special measures of just over a term is highly ambitious given the wide-ranging improvements needed. Actions appear condensed into a short time frame and lack a clear ordering of priorities. The local authority statement of action does not meet requirements. It does not fully assess the scope for the school to be closed with an analysis of surplus places in better performing local schools; nor does it clearly identify how it will inform parents and carers about the actions planned for the school and how it will gather and take into account their views. School leaders and governors have nonetheless held meetings with parents, and strengthened communications with parents by improving the newsletter and working to develop the school website.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made.

The local authority statement of action is not 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 and the Director of Children's Services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector