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Mrs Paulette Osborne
Executive Headteacher
Harper Bell Seventh Day Adventist School
29 Ravenhurst Street
Camp Hill
Birmingham
B12 0EJ

Dear Mrs Osborne

Special measures monitoring inspection of Harper Bell Primary School

Following my visit with Deana Holdaway, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 7–8 November 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 March 2013. 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 reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and 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

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching and speed up pupils' progress by:
 - making sure lessons help pupils learn at an appropriately brisk pace
 - making sure that teachers know how well pupils are doing and plan lessons that help pupils to learn more
 - giving children in the Reception and Nursery classes more choice to learn through a range of activities
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to study science, history and geography and acquire ICT skills
 - increasing the amount of work pupils do to use and practise their mathematical skills
 - giving pupils clearer guidance on how to improve their work.

- Make sure that the school meets safeguarding requirements by:
 - carrying out fire drills at the start of each term
 - ensuring that staff know the whereabouts of all children at all times.

- Improve behaviour by implementing a system for tackling disobedience and bullying, involving sanctions and rewards, which is used consistently by all staff.

- Improve the effectiveness of leaders, managers and governors by:
 - providing training, support and resources to teachers in charge of subjects to improve
 - teaching and raise standards in their subjects across the school
 - implementing a rigorous programme to check and improve the quality of teaching
 - making sure that the teacher responsible for coordinating provision for special educational needs receives the full backing of senior leaders and the scope to take steps to improve the progress of pupils who find learning difficult
 - training governors to check the school's work and giving them accurate information so that they are able to hold senior leaders to account
 - improving leaders methods for checking on pupils' progress and using this information to improve the quality of teaching
 - undertaking an external review of governance to assess how this aspect of leadership may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 7–8 November 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, listened to pupils read and met with the executive and acting headteachers, and staff with leadership responsibilities. Inspectors also held discussions with pupils, and meetings were held with five members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.

Context

The school is still beset by staffing changes. The executive headteacher resigned her post in July 2013. A new executive headteacher, seconded from a neighbouring school, and a new acting operational headteacher took up post in September 2013. A new National Leader in Education has begun to work with the school to support improvement.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Lesson observations, work in pupils' books and the school's own records confirm that progress remains inadequate for the majority of pupils across the school.

Children joining the Reception class are assessed as having skills, knowledge and understanding typical for their age, and a small proportion have skills above those expected. By the end of the Reception Year, some children have fallen behind in their learning and are not ready to cope with the requirements of the National Curriculum in Year 1. In the teacher assessments at end of Year 2 in 2013, no pupils reached Level 3 in reading, writing and mathematics. Given their starting points, this level of attainment is unacceptable.

Pupils' attainment in writing at the end of Year 6 has declined, as shown by the Key Stage 2 national test results. It is now significantly below that of all pupils nationally. Boys attain less well than girls. Those eligible for additional government funding through the pupil premium do not achieve as well as their peers. The attainment and progress of pupils with special educational needs is particularly poor. Pupils' writing in all classes is weak, and yet they are given few opportunities or support to check their work for accuracy; to correct basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar; or to use dictionaries to check the meaning of key vocabulary.

Little work is recorded in pupils' books and there is an over-reliance on worksheets. There is insufficient development of pupils' knowledge over time, particularly in science and history. It was typical for there to be fewer than four examples of work in pupils' books since the beginning of the autumn term. Teachers use poorly photocopied resources to deliver their lessons and a lack of good-quality reading

books, mathematics resources and good-quality information books is severely limiting the learning and progress of all pupils.

The quality of teaching

Weaknesses in teaching highlighted at the previous inspection persist. The overwhelming majority of teaching observed during this monitoring inspection was inadequate, with little that was good. Although some features of teaching have improved, these are not yet substantial or consistent enough to have brought about significant improvements in pupils' progress. Teachers' lack of knowledge of the subjects they teach, and how to teach them effectively, limits the progress pupils make.

Pupils continue to make inadequate progress in lessons. Teachers do not assess pupils' abilities or identify gaps in their learning to plan work that accurately meets pupils' needs. Teachers' expectations are not high enough, especially for the most-able pupils. The lack of teachers' clear and precise knowledge of pupils' progress means that teachers are unable to quickly pinpoint underachievement and intervene to eradicate it. As a consequence, pupils are too often passive in lessons and fail to engage with their teachers. This unreceptiveness further slows pupils' progress.

Pupils' enjoyment of, and attitude to, their learning is poor. There are few practical or focused activities to encourage pupils to reflect on their learning or consider how to improve. This is particularly the case in lessons where tasks set are mundane or dull because teachers' expectations of the pupils' capabilities are too low. In these lessons, pupils are not sufficiently challenged and their progress is limited. Teachers have a poor understanding of the requirements placed upon them by the National Curriculum and the standards expected of pupils by the end of each key stage. Pupils are frequently bored and not motivated to do the best that they can.

Teachers do not effectively deploy teaching assistants to support pupils' learning because they fail to give support staff a clear direction. Assistants often sit passively while the teacher speaks to the whole class, with some unable to take responsibility for small groups of pupils. In addition, teachers do not assess pupils' progress during lessons with enough care to enable them to plan for the pupils' next steps in learning.

Weaknesses in teachers' marking limit how quickly pupils make progress. Teachers do not follow up errors in pupils' work and they accept work that is careless and untidy. Some work is not marked at all. Therefore, pupils continue to repeat mistakes.

Teaching in the Reception class is improving slowly, albeit from a very low base. The accuracy of teaching specific skills, such as the knowledge of letters and sounds (phonics) to promote early reading, has improved. Teachers' planning shows a more

appropriate balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities, providing opportunities for children to begin to develop their independence.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Unsafe or boisterous play and poor behaviour evident at the time of the previous monitoring inspection persists. The management of pupils' behaviour remains weak. Teachers' low expectations of pupils' abilities contribute to inadequate behaviour in lessons. Failure by adults to deal effectively with rough 'play' prevents pupils' behaviour from improving.

The school's log of pupil accidents records a high proportion of non-accidental injuries. Adults do not investigate complaints from pupils thoroughly and, too often, excuses are made for poor behaviour and rough play. Pupils report that they are fearful of bullying and these worries, combined with the over-excited play, cause pupils to feel unsafe in school. They say that they do not feel safe during playtimes. Despite this, pupils also say that they enjoy and appreciate new resources and organised games available at lunchtimes.

The behaviour policy is overly complex. Although rules and sanctions are displayed in classrooms, they are not sufficiently concise to remind pupils how to behave. The policy places too much emphasis on the individual pupil rather the expected behaviour within the school community. The expectations of the member of staff in charge of behaviour are not high enough. Pupils' concerns are not taken seriously; for example, pupils report that when they express concern about other pupils' behaviour, they are accused of telling untruths. The impact of support for the pupils is not monitored accurately or reported to governors.

Monitoring of attendance and punctuality lacks rigour. A high proportion of absences are unauthorised. Leaders have not taken strong enough measures to tackle a preconception in the community that children do not need to attend regularly or come to school on time: records show that an unacceptable proportion of pupils arrive late every day. Reasons for pupils' late arrival are too readily accepted and not sufficiently challenged. Systems to reward or challenge punctuality are ineffective.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders still fail to monitor the quality of lessons frequently or rigorously enough. There is insufficient palpable evidence that the intended benefits of professional development or new initiatives are implemented successfully into everyday classroom practice. Consequently, leaders have not been able to demonstrate sufficient capability for sustaining improvement against the planned actions.

Pupils are still not taught a wide enough range of subjects, although some time has now been made available for history and science. Opportunities for pupils to develop

their writing and mathematical skills in other subjects are weak. Teachers do not ensure that activities in science and history are matched to pupils' different learning needs.

Teachers responsible for subjects do not have the knowledge of their particular subject, or the skills of effective classroom practitioners, to demonstrate sufficient credibility to advise colleagues of how to improve their teaching.

Issues regarding the supervision of the youngest children have been resolved with the relocation of children's toilets to within the Nursery class. Systems to enable teachers to know where children are at all times have been introduced and are becoming more effective. Fire drills at the beginning of the autumn term revealed that pupils did not exit the building quickly enough. Procedures were reviewed and amended, and a later fire practice showed improvement. However, the buildings present on-going barriers to securing pupils' safety in school and the playground. A particular concern is for the safe evacuation of pupils taught on the upper floor of the building. There are no external fire escapes, and current escape routes are restricted.

Those staff responsible for child protection are not sufficiently aware of their responsibilities. For example, a teacher appointed in September 2013 has not received the required child protection training. Pupils are not adequately aware of who they tell if they have concerns. The child protection policy does not have the correct member of staff identified as the named person.

Governance remains weak. An external review was conducted in July 2013 and the local authority provided training to enable governors to improve their skills, but not all governors attended. Governors' expectations of how rapidly improvements need to take place are too low. There is insufficient commitment or urgency from them to drive improvement.

The financial management of the school is weak. This is particularly the case in relation to the Nursery class, where there is confusion regarding its legal status and whether it is an independent nursery or maintained by the local authority. Currently, the school's budget is in significant deficit and current spending levels, particularly on the high proportion of support staff, are unsustainable. It is unacceptable that pupils are required to sit at tables and chairs that are the incorrect size for their ages. Systems to identify income against expenditure, with clear lines of responsibility, have not been established.

The governors' risk assessments of the school site are inadequate. For example, there is no access for disabled pupils. Three recently appointed governors have brought fresh vigour and determination to the governing body. For example, they have formed a task committee to oversee improved teaching and learning, leadership and management, and health and safety. Two further committees have

been formed with responsibility for staffing, finance and premises. Governors have begun to gather first-hand evidence of the school's work through visits to classrooms. However, these developments are too recent to have had an impact on improvement.

After 13 days in post, the new executive headteacher demonstrates a clear understanding of, and a determined commitment to, resolving complex and deep-seated historical problems. She is clear about the urgency to eradicate widespread inadequate teaching. Training is now focused sharply on where there is greatest need; particularly, teaching and learning.

External support

The impact of the support provided by the local authority, consultants and the National Leaders in Education since the school was placed in special measures has been limited. Governors currently lack the capacity to make the best use of some of the support offered by the local authority. They would benefit from further training to enable them to provide a stronger strategic lead, particularly in respect of: provision for pupils who have special educational needs; the analysis of assessment information; improving teaching and learning; ensuring the school's financial probity. Given the confusion regarding the status of the school's Nursery and its associated funding, the local authority should consider, as a matter of urgency, undertaking a full audit of the school's finances and management systems.

The local authority progress review group continues to provide reasonable challenge, ensuring that senior staff are held accountable for the impact of their actions. Local authority officers reviewed the school's progress in July 2013. The review indicated that the impact of consultants, advanced skills teachers and mentors was not resulting in standards rising quickly enough. Inspectors agree.