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Asiyah Ravat
Interim Headteacher
Al-Furqan Primary School
Reddings Lane
Tyseley
Birmingham
B11 3EY

Dear Ms Ravat

Special measures monitoring inspection of Al-Furqan Primary School

Following my visit with Rachel Howie, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 26–27 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 third 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.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher 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 third monitoring inspection on 26–27 November 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteachers, the teachers with responsibilities for English, mathematics and different key stages, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and four other members, groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority. HMI additionally took account of 41 staff questionnaires responses.

During this monitoring inspection, HMI spent approximately 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 invited parents and carers to a meeting in the evening. HMI spoke to parents and carers informally at the start of the second day of the inspection and joined the interim headteacher during her weekly meeting with parents and carers. In addition to these opportunities, HMI asked senior leaders to arrange for a group of parents and carers to meet with them. HMI also took account of correspondence from parents and carers. There were insufficient responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) for these to be made available to inspectors.

Context

There have been a number of changes with staffing. The interim headteacher, who started at the school in February 2013, left the school in October 2013. Another interim headteacher, seconded from a local school, joined the school at the same time. Two assistant headteachers and three teachers started at the school in September 2013. As part of the local authority support arrangements, senior leaders and teachers from a number of local schools have continued to support staff at Al-Furqan. As reported previously, all pupils are taught by teachers.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' work and lesson observations confirm that pupils are continuing to make better progress. In the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, pupils are making at least expected progress and many are making good progress. In Key Stage 2, rates of progress remain more variable, with pupils making inadequate progress in some lessons.

The progress made by disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is improving, with some pupils now making good progress. This is because teachers are getting better at planning activities that better match these pupils' learning needs. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are also receiving additional and appropriate support with reading, writing and mathematics.

More-able pupils do not always make fast enough progress because, in some lessons, they are not provided with suitably challenging work.

Standards remain below average but are rising steadily. Actions to raise attainment in reading have been particularly successful. Pupils are using their knowledge of letters and sounds (phonics) with increased confidence to read unfamiliar words. Pupils told HMI that they are enjoying reading at home and school, and keeping a record of the books they have read in their 'reading logs'. They are excited about the new library, which includes books that they have selected. Teachers are getting better at selecting writing themes that are relevant to pupils' interests. They are also placing a greater emphasis on pupils using punctuation and grammar correctly. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise the skills they have learnt by producing longer pieces of writing.

Pupils have a clearer understanding of different aspects of mathematics such as, number, shape, money and time. Pupils in all classes do not have enough occasions to use their knowledge to find answers to complex mathematical questions. This is preventing them from making consistently good progress in mathematics.

The quality of teaching

Teaching continues to improve. There was more good teaching than at the time of the last monitoring inspection. Lesson observations during this monitoring inspection and a review of pupils' work confirm leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching which show that the proportion of consistently good teaching is increasing and occurrences of inadequate teaching are reducing. Some of the good teaching observed in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 1 had outstanding features. In contrast, some teaching observed in Key Stage 2 was inadequate.

When teaching was most effective, activities provided pupils of different abilities with a suitable level of challenge. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs had appropriate resources, such as pertinent words to help them with their writing. Teachers had high expectations of the quality and quantity of work pupils were expected to produce during the lesson, and this encouraged all pupils to work with a sense of urgency. Teachers planned interesting activities. In a Reception class, for example, some children used their knowledge of phonics to write invitations to a party, while, at the same time, another group worked on their own to make words out of clay. 'This is fun and it is helping me to learn new words,' said one child excitedly.

In some lessons, teachers failed to give pupils activities that were appropriately challenging. This was especially the case for the more-able pupils who found activities easy to complete. Sometimes, pupils did not have sufficient time to complete their work because teachers spent too long providing unnecessary explanations.

Teachers' marking continues to improve. Teachers are using a 'star and a wish' to acknowledge pupils' achievements and to identify the 'next steps' for improvement. However, these 'next steps' are not precise enough and pupils are not always sure of the exact actions they need to take in response to the teachers' comments. Some pupils are still not forming their letters correctly or presenting their work neatly. This is particularly the case in Years 3 and 4.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour although improving, continues to require improvement. In lessons, teachers are getting better at ensuring pupils are more actively involved during all parts of a lesson. For instance, pupils respond particularly well when sharing ideas with a 'talk partner' or carrying out their own research. Pupils become restless when they are expected to listen passively or when activities are not demanding enough.

Pupils describe the school as 'a much better place'. Around school, they are well supervised. This ensures they move around the building quietly and calmly. Behaviour during break times remains variable. Older pupils can be a little boisterous as they play. Pupils told HMI that, occasionally, a few pupils do not 'speak nicely'. However, they confirmed that such incidents are dealt with appropriately. At the time of the previous monitoring inspection, pupils raised concerns about the limited time available to play outside. The school day has been reorganised so that pupils across the school go out at different times. Pupils told HMI that they appreciate these changes because they now have more time to play.

A number of parents that spoke to HMI were complimentary about the work of the Pastoral Team. This team ensure that behaviour incidents are dealt with correctly and swiftly. They also promote good behaviour by providing individual pupils with the support they need. This work is contributing to a further reduction in the small number of lunchtime behaviour incidents.

Senior leaders have broadened the range of rewards to promote regular attendance. Pupils' particularly appreciate the 'pizza party' for the class with the best attendance. Attendance has improved and is now in line with the national average for primary schools.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The interim headteacher is providing strong and determined leadership. HMI agree with the staff, parents and carers who commented that 'she has high expectations' and that 'she is helping to improve the school'. With effective support from the deputy headteacher and the two assistant headteachers, she has built upon the systems introduced by the previous interim headteacher. The newly formed senior

leadership team are committed to improving the quality of teaching and helping pupils to make better progress.

The deputy headteacher, in partnership with the interim headteacher, has carefully checked and analysed the information related to the progress of individual pupils. The analysis of this information has been discussed with individual teachers. Consequently, teachers are aware of the correct levels at which pupils in their class are working and the specific actions that need to be taken to help individual pupils make good progress. The assistant headteachers are contributing positively to this process by ensuring that pupils, such as those with special educational needs, get the additional support they need and that teachers receive the guidance they need to better meet the learning needs of pupils. This is a positive and recent development since the previous monitoring inspection. The full impact of this work has yet to be seen.

The procedures for managing teachers' performance have been strengthened further. Teachers have discussed and reviewed the actions that they need to take to improve the quality of their work with senior leaders. The interim headteacher is ensuring that teachers are continuing to receive relevant support and training from senior leaders and staff from local schools. This approach is helping individual teachers to improve their practice. Senior leaders are regularly observing teachers and checking pupils' work. They are acknowledging what teachers are doing well and also the actions that need to be taken to help pupils make faster progress. Senior leaders are not yet making sure that all teachers implement these agreed actions quickly enough. This is resulting in continued variation in the quality of teaching and rates of progress across the school.

Teachers with responsibility for year groups and subjects are more aware of their roles and responsibilities. There is still much to do to ensure that they gain the skills required to lead developments in the school. Senior leaders and staff from local schools are currently providing them with support.

The Chair of IEB continues to provide senior leaders with a good level of support. Members of the IEB are asking pertinent and challenging questions about pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. Following the previous monitoring inspection, the IEB, in partnership with the interim headteacher, took decisive action to make suitable changes to the school day. Pupils in Key Stage 1 and 2 are now taught for the number of hours that the government recommends. The IEB will be introducing a 'Focus Group' from within the IEB. This group will regularly check the work of the school for themselves.

The majority of parents and carers who met with inspectors remain positive about the changes that are taking place in the school. Some parents and carers who spoke with HMI complimented the work of the previous and new interim headteacher. They described staff as approachable and stated that senior leaders were continuing

to listen to and act upon concerns. Parents and carers are increasingly providing senior leaders with on-going written feedback about different aspects of the school's work. For instance, parents have written to say that their child is making better progress, and to praise the work of specific teachers and staff.

A small minority of parents are concerned about a number of issues, including homework, the school's procedures for keeping pupils safe and the support available for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. HMI discussed these concerns with the relevant staff in school, the Chair of the IEB and the local authority. In response to concerns about homework, senior leaders have recently extended the range of homework so that there is an even greater focus on reading, spelling and times-tables. Senior leaders recognise the need to ensure that all class teachers send pupils home with the full range of homework activities. With regards to keeping pupils safe, inspection evidence confirms that the school's procedures meet the necessary requirements. Pupils said that they feel safe in school, and this view was shared by many parents and carers who spoke with HMI. In response to concerns about the support available for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, five teachers have been redeployed to work with individual and groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs. Pupils' work shows that these teachers are helping disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make better progress than in the recent past.

Senior leaders are continuing to improve communications with parents and carers. In partnership with the IEB and local authority, senior leaders are listening to concerns and taking appropriate action. The interim headteacher has established a weekly 'surgery' so that parents can meet with her. Senior leaders ensure that they are available to speak with parents and carers, and make clear the timescales for resolving concerns. The interim headteacher has continued to produce fortnightly newsletters and ensure that they are available on the school website. Despite this, a small minority of parents remain dissatisfied with the improvements that are being made. HMI are aware that individual members of staff are experiencing unjustified criticism about their work from a few parents and carers. As part of its duty of care, the local authority is rightly responding to individual issues. It is to the credit of individual staff and members of the IEB that they have not allowed these unjustified criticisms to detract them from continuing to improve the school and ensure that pupils receive a better education.

External support

The local authority acted swiftly to secure an interim headteacher for the school. The interim headteacher has considerably strengthened leadership. The local authority and the IEB recognise the need to ensure stability of staffing at leadership level.

Teachers are continuing to benefit from the good level of support provided by a number of local schools. This work is contributing to continuing improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.

HMI recommends that, as a matter of urgency, local authority personnel work with the IEB to take any necessary action required to protect the welfare of individual staff at Al-Furqan.