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Ms Jill Bennett
Headteacher
Priory Primary School
Limes Road
Priory Estate
Dudley
DY1 4AQ

Dear Ms Bennett

Special measures monitoring inspection of Priory Primary School

Following my visit with Rowena Green, Additional Inspector, to your school on 15–16 January 2014, 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 fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in July 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.

Newly qualified teachers may be appointed.

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 Dudley.

Yours sincerely

Mark Sims
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching and accelerate the progress made by all pupils in order to raise attainment in all year groups by:
 - ensuring that there is a systematic approach to teaching skills in reading, writing and mathematics, and by providing regular opportunities for pupils to use and apply these skills across the curriculum
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can do and ensuring that lesson activities are engaging and well-matched to the needs of pupils
 - ensuring that marking tells pupils what they need to do to improve and that pupils are given sufficient opportunities to respond to the advice given
 - using support staff effectively to help pupils learn.

- Improve pupils' behaviour and safety by:
 - ensuring that information about pupils' disabilities and special educational needs is reviewed and shared appropriately so that their needs are planned for and met
 - improving attendance
 - ensuring that actions taken to improve the conduct of pupils who frequently misbehave are sufficiently rigorous to significantly reduce instances of poor behaviour
 - providing a range of play equipment and constructive activities at breaks and lunchtimes
 - promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by giving them more opportunities to enjoy, explore and learn about different cultures and the arts.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management in order to secure rapid improvement by:
 - putting into place, with immediate effect, suitable arrangements to ensure that all staff use the correct procedures to prioritise and record cases where safeguarding concerns are identified
 - sharpening the monitoring and evaluation skills of all leaders and managers
 - ensuring that the governing body holds leaders to account.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 15–16 January 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders including newly-appointed subject coordinators, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, members of staff, groups of pupils and parents, and a representative from the local authority. A number of senior leaders conducted joint lesson observations with inspectors.

Context

There have been several changes in teaching staff due to two resignations, long-term sickness and a recent return from maternity leave, which have affected classes in Years 2, 4 and 5. Assistant headteachers have taken on significant teaching commitments in both Year 2 classes. A restructuring of the teaching assistant provision has just been completed.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Unvalidated results for the most recent tests confirm that standards were low in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2013. Pupils did not make enough progress from their low starting points at the end of Year 2 due to the legacy of weak teaching. Too few pupils achieved or exceeded the expected level for their age in mathematics and reading. In writing, the proportion of pupils making expected progress was close to the national average. Most groups of pupils made similar rates of progress, including those eligible for support from the pupil premium. However, pupils for whom English is an additional language did better than those whose first language is English.

Standards were low in reading and writing in the most recent teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 1. Pupils' attainment in mathematics was broadly in line with the national average. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs did better than their peers nationally. Pupils made good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage as result of improved teaching, particularly in the Reception classes.

School data indicates that pupils made good progress during the autumn term 2013. This is supported in the lessons seen in Reception and Key Stage 1, where good teaching led to rapid progress. Progress remains too variable in lessons seen in Key Stage 2. In one Year 6 science lesson, pupils achieved well when they had the chance to devise and conduct their own experiments on filtration. In some other lessons, progress was hampered by work that was pitched at too difficult a level, which led to pupils being confused about what was expected of them.

The quality of teaching

The large majority of teaching seen in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 was at least good and sometimes outstanding. None was inadequate. There remains inconsistency in the quality of teaching at Key Stage 2, which ranges from good to inadequate. Some Key Stage 2 classes have continued to experience upheaval through teacher-staffing changes.

In the best lessons, pupils had a clear idea of the purpose of the lesson and what was expected of them. They were also given guided choices by teachers and adults about what they should do next. In one outstanding literacy lesson in Year 2, the teaching took account of the sentences pupils had produced on their mini whiteboards before a decision on which activity each pupil should do next.

Pupils worked well with each other in pairs and small groups to provide support for each other, even in those lessons where the pace of the lesson was slow or where they did not fully understand the task. Additional adults asked appropriate questions and gave prompts which helped pupils to understand the work.

In less effective lessons, teachers did not check whether pupils were suitably prepared or able to accomplish a task before setting them to work. Too often, pupils' preparatory work on their mini whiteboards was rubbed off before the teacher even saw it. This led to pupils becoming over-reliant on teachers and additional adults to complete tasks without fully understanding what they were learning.

Marking in books and adults' checking of work is variable. At its best, written marking sets follow-up tasks and challenge questions to which pupils respond. Adults take notes or photographs of pupils' work in order to plan the next steps in their learning. Pupils are involved in checking each other's work and suggesting improvements. Elsewhere, marking and checking are not followed through sufficiently. In these instances, pupils either do not respond to written comments and questions or, if they do, the responses are not marked by the teacher.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils continue to be positive about the dramatic improvements in behaviour and safety since the school was made subject to special measures. The sanctions in place are used very rarely and pupils report that no one now has to be sent to 'The Cooler'. There have been no permanent exclusions in the last three years and fixed-term exclusions have been significantly reduced.

Pupils are taking up the further opportunities available to take responsibility for their behaviour around school. In an increasing number of lessons, they make informed choices about what they want to learn and which learning task is most appropriate

to achieve this. Assemblies reinforce the themes of independence and creativity. Pupils work well together with others of different backgrounds, and conduct themselves politely when greeting visitors and staff.

Pupils feel safe in school. All statutory safeguarding arrangements are met. Overall attendance reduced in 2013 compared to the previous year, although persistent absence has continued to fall. Rigorous checking by leaders and regular reporting to parents led to improvements in the autumn term.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher leads by example through her infectious enthusiasm. The extended leadership team has provided the school with additional capacity to bring about improvements, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Senior leaders accurately identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching. In the short time since some senior leaders have been appointed, they have been able to demonstrate where they have had an impact in improving teaching. They also lead by example in teaching outstanding lessons. Senior leaders are highly focused on maintaining standards in the Nursery and Year 2 but, to date, not enough attention has been paid to the variability in the quality of teaching in Key Stage 2, particularly in Years 4 and 5.

A number of middle leaders have very recently started their roles as subject coordinators. They have identified issues and priorities based on feedback from staff and begun to put improvement plans in place. They have not established a view of the quality of teaching in their subject areas as they are not yet involved in checking teaching and learning.

Changes to the curriculum have led to pupils enjoying a wider range of experiences through topic work and specific subjects taught. The Forest Schools' programme, science week and the introduction of French in Key Stage 2 have all fired pupils' enthusiasm for learning.

Governors are planning ahead for the future direction of the school and provide a strong source of support to the headteacher and other leaders. They are knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses in achievement but are less well informed about the current quality of teaching and the impact of pupil premium funding.

External support

The local authority has continued to provide support in the Early Years Foundation Stage which has led to improvements in provision. It does not have an up-to-date profile, however, of the quality of teaching, particularly in Key Stage 2, or of the

current level of achievement in the school. Support arrangements have been put in place from a successful local school.