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27 March 2014

Mrs Tina Dunkley
The Acting Headteacher
Palfrey Junior School
Dale Street
Walsall
WS1 4AH

Dear Mrs Dunkley

Special measures monitoring inspection of Palfrey Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 27 March 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 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 November 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, your senior leadership team and the subject leaders for numeracy, literacy, including reading and writing, and inclusion. Meetings were held with five members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I reviewed the local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plans. In addition, I reviewed the data that the school has on pupils' progress, governors' minutes of meetings and you and I visited all the classrooms to observe pupils' learning. Additional documentation was scrutinised, including the vetting checks on staff new to the school.

Context

The substantive headteacher has been absent from the school since July 2013. The deputy headteacher, appointed in April 2013, became the acting headteacher at the end of September 2013. An acting deputy headteacher was appointed from the existing staff team in December 2013. Since the inspection in November 2013, two teachers have left the school. Three full-time and two part-time teachers have been appointed. Class sizes in Years 5 and 6 have been reduced as a result. Pupils in Year

6 now have two hours of mathematics a day where previously they had one hour. Two governors have resigned and posts for four governors have been advertised.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

As a result of the uncertainty surrounding the leadership of the school, leaders were initially slow to respond with the necessary urgency to the issues raised at the inspection in November 2013. However, leaders throughout the school have now gained momentum in bringing about much-needed change. Roles and responsibilities for school leaders, teaching staff and teaching assistants are now clearly defined. School leaders, including governors, say they are now clear about the school's priorities and what needs to be done to secure improvements. There is no hint of complacency. All teaching staff have a responsibility to oversee and coordinate at least one subject area. However, it is not clear how the staff carrying out these new roles will be monitored and the impact of their work reviewed.

The monitoring of the quality of teaching is informed by information about pupils' progress and the work in their books. This ensures a more accurate assessment of the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. Information about pupils' progress is collected every half term and pupil progress meetings have been introduced. Teachers have access to a greater range of pupil data which is enabling staff to plan appropriate learning opportunities. Support for the teaching of mathematics, particularly for the most able pupils, has been received from a local secondary school. Information provided by the school indicates that, overall, pupils are making expected progress in mathematics in Years 4, 5 and 6, but not yet in Year 3. Pupils' progress in writing remains an issue, particularly in Years 5 and 6. School leaders are aware of this and have planned appropriate training for staff and intervention for pupils. The use of teaching assistants to support pupils' learning has been reviewed. Intervention by teaching assistants is now carried out in the classroom. As a result, pupils needing help are taken out of the classroom on fewer occasions. Support and intervention for pupils in literacy and mathematics are now additional to what they receive during lesson time.

The governing body has responded positively to the recommendations in the section 5 inspection report. In particular, it has taken action to ensure that all governors are more fully informed about all aspects of school performance. Governors have begun the process of reviewing the statutory policies. The local authority carried out a review of governance in October 2013. However, the external review of governance, including a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, recommended in the section 5 inspection report, has not been carried out. School leaders and governors held a meeting with parents in February to discuss the implications and issues of the school being placed in special measures. However, governors recognise that communication between the school and parents needs to be improved.

School leaders have written a suitable action plan which sets out appropriate actions to improve all the weaknesses identified at the inspection in November. The plan clearly identifies how the actions will be monitored, evaluated and reviewed, and who will carry out these procedures. However, the actions and monitoring should have specific dates for completion to ensure all staff understand the need for urgency in improving pupils' attainment and progress. The plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action describes actions taken by the authority before the section 5 inspection in November 2013 and its proposed actions following the inspection. However, many of the recommendations proposed before the inspection, for example, in issuing a formal warning notice or replacing the governing body with an interim executive board (IEB), were not pursued. Monitoring and evaluation procedures lack clarity, so it is unclear how the local authority will ensure that the school remains on track to improve. The criteria for judging the impact of the actions are also unclear. The statement of action does not clearly identify the people responsible for leading and taking action to improve pupils' outcomes, nor does it make clear when and how the school's progress will be evaluated. The local authority statement of action is, therefore, not fit for purpose.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made.

The local authority's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The school's action plans are 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

Peter Humphries
Her Majesty's Inspector