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Mrs Angela Hill and Mr Max Vlahakis
Headteacher and Executive Headteacher
Butts Primary School
Butts Road
Walsall
West Midlands
WS4 2AH

Dear Mrs Hill and Mr Vlahakis

Special measures monitoring inspection of Butts Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 21 and 23 May 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Walsall.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching so that it is good in all years by:
 - raising the expectations of staff about what pupils of all abilities are capable of achieving
 - making sure that teachers' assessments are accurate and used to plan work that is closely matched to pupils' needs and capabilities
 - making sure that lessons engage all pupils' interest particularly during the main teaching sections
 - training teachers to use probing questions during lessons to assess pupils understanding and to use the information to adapt their teaching
 - ensuring that teachers mark in enough detail to give pupils precise guidance on what they have done well and how to improve their work
 - further ensuring that all staff are skilled in managing pupils' behaviour and follow the school's discipline code consistently
 - ensuring the continuity and quality of lesson planning, particularly when pupils are taught by different adults, so that their learning proceeds smoothly.
- Raise pupils' achievement by:
 - ensuring that the needs of pupils supported by pupil premium funding, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are accurately assessed and that they receive effective support to help them learn well
 - improving the teaching of reading, particularly in Years 2 to 5, so that pupils gain a deeper level of understanding and knowledge about the books they read and read widely in school and at home
 - giving pupils regular opportunities to practise their basic skills in writing and mathematics in a range of subjects and to develop their skills in using mathematics to solve problems
 - ensuring pupils always present their work neatly and use good handwriting skills
 - increasing attendance to at least average for all groups of pupils.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - establishing a regular programme of meetings with teachers to discuss the progress of the pupils that they teach and to identify ways of tackling underachievement
 - using the most effective teachers to support their colleagues through coaching and by demonstrating good practice
 - training all leaders fully in analysing and using information about pupils' progress to pinpoint areas of strength and weakness
 - training leaders to use lesson observation, work scrutiny and the analysis of assessment data to evaluate the school's performance accurately and to identify precise actions that will raise pupils' achievement and improve teaching and learning
 - securing the services of an experienced and effective school leader to support and guide the senior leadership team.

- Improve the governance of the school by:
 - making sure that governors receive regular and frank updates on pupils' progress and the quality of teaching
 - training governors to challenge leaders about the performance of the school, including the impact of pupil premium spending on pupils' achievement
 - ensuring that the arrangements for managing teachers' performance are robust and are closely monitored by the governing body
 - following the recommendations of the local authority's review of governance, which is currently under way.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 21 and 23 May 2014

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and held discussions with the headteacher and executive headteacher, subject leaders, staff, pupils, parents, a group of governors including the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, and the local authority school improvement adviser. The inspection was not held on consecutive days because the school was closed on 22 May 2014 for use as a polling station.

Context

The school's leadership has undergone significant change. One of the headteachers, who previously led the school on an interim basis, has now been appointed as full-time substantive headteacher. The other, who is also headteacher of Alumwell Junior School, has now become executive headteacher of the federation of Butts Primary and Alumwell Junior schools. This federation was formally confirmed by the governing bodies of both schools during the inspection, to come into force on 2 June 2014. The governing bodies have merged into a single governing body for the whole federation.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils in Year 6 remain on course to achieve national test and assessment results that are a marked improvement on those in recent years in mathematics, reading and especially writing. Pupils in Year 6 show a great interest in learning, and have developed much confidence in articulating their views, orally and in writing, on a wide range of topical issues. Across the school, pupils' attitudes to learning have similarly improved, with most keen to do well and find out more, in and outside of class. The reorganisation of, and investment in, the library have substantially boosted pupils' interest in reading for pleasure and interest. Writing standards are generally rising and pupils are taking care over the presentation and detail of their work in subjects across the curriculum. Writing standards in Year 2, however, remain weak. While pupils are now much more enthused and engaged in their learning, they do not consistently apply the basic principles of grammar and presentation to keep up the quality of their writing.

Pupils' rates of progress have improved sharply in most classes across the school. Pupils are responding particularly well in the large majority of classes where work is adapted to challenge the more able and support those who find learning more difficult. Progress is restricted in the few remaining instances where all work at the same level, so that lower attaining pupils do not finish and the more able work slowly. Pupils with special educational needs are making particularly good progress in Key Stage 2 as a result of careful planning of provision. School data suggest that there is no pattern of gaps in performance between pupils eligible for support from

the pupil premium and others. Indeed, these pupils outperform their peers in a number of classes.

In mathematics, pupils demonstrate secure calculation skills. They are increasingly challenged to apply these to the solution of complex problems, but there remain some variations between classes in the extent and quality of problem-solving work.

The quality of teaching

Substantial improvements have been made in the quality of teaching since the last monitoring inspection. In particular, most teachers' planning is now highly explicit in specifying how the learning of pupils across the ability range will be extended. The nursery staff, for example, use detailed records of children's developmental stages to shape activities which extend each child's learning and skills. In the small minority of instances in the school where teaching is weaker, it is mainly because all pupils are set the same task regardless of ability, leaving lower attaining pupils to flounder and higher attaining pupils to disengage. Teaching in an increasing number of classes is now showing the strengths of that in Year 6 in 'seizing the moment'; identifying when a pupil or group of pupils have completed a task successfully and immediately extending a new challenge. Mathematics books in Year 2, for example, show that pupils are making strong progress in responding to such challenges. Teachers generally plan very effectively with teaching assistants to support the learning of different groups. In a few cases, however, teaching assistants' questioning of pupils in larger groups does not always ensure that every pupil participates or understands.

The marking of pupils' work is rigorous and is promoting higher standards. Teachers' comments are linked to pupils' assessment targets and the success criteria for pieces of work, and show pupils how to improve. In mathematics, pupils often respond to the teacher's marking by correcting or improving work, but this is not consistently the case in other subjects. Through regular marking, teachers are now applying high expectations to the quality of pupils' written work across all subjects of the curriculum. This is having a strong impact on pupils' progress in writing. In Year 4, for example, exceptionally thorough and supportive marking ensures that pupils write neatly and in detail across all subjects.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The improvement in the school's ethos is palpable. Pupils are enjoying their lessons more and, as a consequence, are behaving much more consistently well in class. They enjoy getting involved in the wider range of sports clubs and other activities now available, and take pride in their success as, for example, in winning a local Maths Challenge tournament with other schools. Pupils' attendance continues to improve and is currently above average, with persistent absence more than halved over the last year. Pupils appreciate the significant investment in facilities, such as the library and playground facilities, although there are currently no formal means or school council through which pupils can have their say on school development.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The appointment of the headteacher to the full-time, substantive post has brought much-needed stability to the school's senior leadership. Staff speak positively of the benefits of having the headteacher readily available to address any concerns, and of the renewed certainty about the future direction of the school. The headteacher and executive headteacher have continued to work successfully to strengthen accountability across the staff for securing pupils' good progress. Their monitoring of teaching has been thorough, supportive and rigorous in setting clear expectations for effective performance. They have nurtured a strong sense of teamwork by developing joint staff planning and moderation activities. Parents value the information they receive through the new website and weekly newsletter.

The capacity of the school to improve has been strengthened by a transformation in the effectiveness of middle leadership. Through effective training and professional development, the leaders of English and mathematics are now confident in using data on pupils' progress to identify underachievement. They check books and visit lessons to help monitor and improve teaching and learning. Middle leaders, including leaders of the Early Years Foundation Stage and inclusion, are increasingly well informed and often innovative.

Governors have continued to work with determination and success to set in place arrangements for a federation with Alumwell Junior School, as a means of securing a relationship which has brought considerable benefits to Butts. Governors have continued to monitor the work of the school, although the information they receive has not always been sufficiently evaluative or timely. The school's self-evaluation too often lists tasks completed rather than evaluating the school's strengths and weaknesses and comparing performance against national benchmarks. This was a weakness at the first monitoring inspection and undermines the capacity to improve. The school's development plan is better at identifying key priorities for improvement, although it lacks sharply measurable criteria against which success can be measured and evaluated.

External support

The school's relationship with Alumwell Junior School has continued to yield substantial benefits, especially in terms of school leadership and the sharing of the expertise of staff in both schools.

Local authority support for subject leaders has been very effective. The local authority has changed its method of reviewing the school's improvement from monthly progress review group (PRG) meetings to termly improvement review group (IRG) meetings. The first IRG meeting between local authority, school leaders and governors in March was far more rigorous and sharply detailed in evaluating the school's performance than PRG meetings had been. However, the minutes of that meeting, which contain very useful detail and would be very helpful to the school's self-evaluation, had not been sent to the school by the start of the inspection; nor

has the date for a summer term meeting been agreed. The governing body had not, therefore, seen the IRG minutes. The IRG approach has potentially strong benefits, but its findings need disseminating in a timely manner to be effective.