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

Special measures monitoring inspection of Harper Bell Seventh Day Adventist School

Following my visit with Morag Kophamel, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 21–22 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 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not 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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries
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 third monitoring inspection on 21– 22 May 2014

Evidence

During this inspection inspectors observed learning and teaching in a range of subjects in each of the school's eight classes, including the Early Years Foundation Stage. Meetings were held with the executive headteacher and operational headteacher, other leaders and the Chair and members of the interim executive board (IEB). Discussions were held with pupils, members of staff and parents. The views of parents were noted from the 31 responses on Parent View. Telephone conversations were held with representatives of the local authority and the Birmingham diocese. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including the school's analysis of pupils' current attainment and progress, monitoring records of the quality of teaching undertaken by school leaders, and the minutes of IEB meetings.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in November 2013 the operational headteacher has been replaced, nine members of teaching staff have left the school and the IEB has been established. All subject leader posts have been relinquished. The support the school receives from St Matthew's Church of England Primary School and St Mary's Church of England Primary Academy and Nursery and has been increased. The school's leaders, in partnership with the local authority and the proposed sponsor, the Birmingham diocese, are actively pursuing academy status.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's latest information on pupils' attainment, lessons observed during the inspection and the work in pupils' books show that standards in reading and mathematics are rising and pupils are making faster progress than they were when the school was judged to require special measures. The long-standing pattern of underachievement is being reversed. Pupils' attainment in mathematics is in line with age-related expectations across all year groups. Work in pupils' mathematics books demonstrates that their needs are met through a range of activities that cover all aspects of the subject such as number, algebra, shape and data handling, and that they are given opportunities to use and apply their mathematical knowledge and skills to solve a range of problems. Their progress in reading, particularly in Year 2, is enabling an increasing number of pupils to reach standards at and beyond those expected for their age. Pupils have frequent opportunities to read and the majority do so with accuracy, fluency and expression.

However, pupils' writing is less well developed, except in Year 1. Leaders are tackling this issue through a range of strategies to increase the number of opportunities pupils have to write.

The proportion of children reaching a good stage of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is increasing. This has been confirmed through checks made by the local authority. The pupils' performance in the Year 1 national phonics test remains in line with the national average.

The pace of pupils' progress varies across year groups and groups of pupils, and within subjects. Examples of good progress are seen in Year 6 and Year 1, but it is much slower in Years 3 and 4. Leaders understand that progress needs to be accelerated, particularly in writing, if the lost ground in learning is to be recovered so that pupils' achievement is good or better in all subjects.

The quality of teaching

Pupils' attainment is improving because the quality of teaching is improving. Information provided by the school, and confirmed by lessons observed during the inspection, shows that there are more lessons across the school that meet the learning needs of the pupils. In the majority of lessons, pupils' learning progresses at an appropriate pace. The work in the majority of pupils' books shows that the quality and quantity of work are appropriate to their age and capabilities.

Teachers are ensuring that pupils' mathematical reasoning, knowledge and understanding are secure. The teaching of phonics and reading is having a positive impact on the pupils' enjoyment of reading and ability to read with fluency and expression. However, the teaching of writing is less secure as teachers do not effectively model good writing.

Teachers commented that the training provided since the last monitoring visit in November 2013 has helped them plan and teach engaging and stimulating lessons. However, during the inspection inspectors observed a minority of lessons that failed to capture the interest of pupils. This meant that their concentration wavered, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Leaders have provided training on how to mark pupils' work and to give feedback that supports pupils' learning. The marking in pupils' books shows that this aspect of the teachers' work has improved considerably since November. Pupils commented that they find the feedback useful in improving their work. However, pupils are not yet consistently acting upon the advice given.

Leaders have increased the number of subjects pupils study. The focus remains on English and mathematics, but pupils stated that they appreciate the increased opportunity to study geography, history, computing and science through project

work. However, the work in pupils' books shows that the quality of writing in project work is less well developed than in literacy.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour in lessons and during breaks has improved since the monitoring inspection in November. There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere in the school. The majority of pupils say they enjoy coming to school and feel safe, secure and well cared for.

Pupils generally demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and a desire to do well in a range of subjects. Pupils show perseverance and support each other when they face difficulties in completing their work. The work in books is complete, well presented, neat, and accurate and reflects pupils' pride in their work. Pupils said that the introduction of the 'Five Golden Rules' (persevere, be kind and gentle, be a learner, be respectful, be positive) displayed in all classrooms and around the school has helped them focus on their work and be kind to all people. They added that the increased number of rewards and awards for positive behaviour and attendance has 'encouraged us to be good'. Information provided by the school indicates that the number of incidents of poor behaviour has decreased. However, inspectors witnessed a minority of pupils exhibiting inappropriate behaviour when lessons failed to fully engage their interest. A minority of parents who spoke to inspectors stated that their child sometimes complained about poor behaviour. Leaders recognise that there is still work to be done in ensuring all pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning.

Information provided by the school indicates that the number of bullying incidents has declined since the previous monitoring inspection. Pupils said that any bullying is quickly and effectively dealt with by leaders and teachers.

Pupils' attendance remains in line with national figures and the number of pupils who are persistently absent is low. The procedures for monitoring absence are rigorous and thorough. Pupils' punctuality has improved since the monitoring inspection in November. Leaders have worked closely with parents to ensure that pupils arrive at school on time.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Led by the executive headteacher and supported well by the other leaders, no time has been wasted since the previous monitoring inspection in changing the culture of the school and the attitude of staff and pupils. Learning resources have been updated and are supporting the improvements in the quality of teaching. Leaders regularly check on the performance of teachers and provide tailored training for individuals. The vast majority of staff who spoke with inspectors were positive about

the training and support they have received from leaders and recognise the need for further improvements.

Leaders check on the progress of pupils and use this information to identify the school's strengths and areas for development. However, these checks are not frequent enough to inspire a sense of urgency in speeding up pupils' progress.

The leaders with responsibility for child protection and for pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs have attended appropriate training. Policies and procedures to keep pupils safe and to meet their needs meet required standards. They enable pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable to feel safe and secure and to make expected progress.

The IEB, established in April 2014, has acted quickly in challenging leaders to accelerate improvements. The executive headteacher provides the IEB with detailed and accurate information. This enables it to focus support where it is needed most, for example in challenging underperforming staff.

Leaders including the IEB, partner schools, the local authority and the Birmingham diocese are considering the school's conversion to academy status. The previous instability in the school's staffing and leadership has, to some extent, been resolved. However, from discussions with leaders and stakeholders it is evident that doubts about the future of the school remain. The conversion to academy status could remove many of the remaining uncertainties. The formation of a multi-academy trust with St Matthew's Church of England Primary School, St Mary's Church of England Primary Academy and Nursery and St Michael's Church of England Junior and Infant School, Handsworth would formalise the leadership and support structure.

External support

The regular support from representatives of the local authority is appropriate for the needs of the school. Links with St Matthew's Church of England Primary School and St Mary's Church of England Primary Academy and Nursery have provided strategic and focused leadership and support. Harper Bell Seventh Day Adventist School staff receive support, coaching and training from staff at both schools. Teachers are benefiting from these links, as they begin to understand how to provide effective and appropriate learning opportunities for pupils.

The local authority is providing financial expertise and support to leaders and the IEB, and additional funding for essential improvements to the school buildings.

Priorities for further improvement

- Speed up pupils' progress by providing work that has clear learning intentions and stretches and engages all pupils.

- Ensure that all staff provide feedback and marking that show pupils how to improve their work, and that pupils act upon this advice.
- Raise standards and speed up pupils' progress in writing in all year groups.
- Make more frequent checks on pupils' progress. Use this information to plan and provide appropriate learning opportunities and support and guidance, and to inform regular discussions of pupils' progress between teachers and leaders.