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Janet Weatherley
Firs Primary School
Dreghorn Road
Castle Bromwich
Birmingham
B36 8LL

Dear Mrs Weatherley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Firs Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 9 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in month and year. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- consider models of management so that responsibilities and accountabilities can be best delegated in support of leadership
- decide who will monitor the school's progress and how this will be achieved
- identify who will evaluate the impact of the actions taken.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the interim headteacher, a Local Leader for Education and a National Leader for Governance from Moor Hall primary School and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. The staff handbook, monitoring records of the quality of teaching and performance

management and lesson observations were seen. In addition, minutes of governing body meetings and their meetings with the local authority were taken into consideration.

Context

Significant staff changes have occurred since the last section 5 inspection in May 2014 with 19 new members of staff joining the school in September.

Main findings

Since your appointment as interim headteacher you have displayed considerable courage, tenacity and resolve. You have managed a range of complex, historical circumstances while keeping the pupils' needs at the core of your determination and direction. All those involved in discussions today have commented on the substantial difficulties you have encountered and your ability to move the school forward on a positive track despite the problems. As one person said, 'the headteacher has an inner core of strength'.

Following the section 5 inspection in May this year, a large proportion of staff resigned. You worked throughout the August break to ensure that new appointments were made in time for the new term. Although the areas for improvement identified during the inspection were considered last term, the real energy and urgency has only recently been enabled with the recruitment of new staff. While all classes now have teachers, the structure of the middle and senior leadership team remains a matter for further consideration. The school is supported well by a Local Leader for Education and National Leader for Governance from Moor Hall Primary School which is part of the Learning Trust for Excellence. In addition, you have invited specific expertise from other school-to-school partnerships where appropriate. You have appointed six newly qualified teachers but ensured professional and skilled support for them from the Moor Hall assistant headteacher. This collaboration is providing considerable support in this interim period and as a consequence, you have the foundations for moving forward.

With the support from the local authority school improvement advisor, you have re-drafted the school action plan which identifies how each of the areas for improvement will be taken forward. You have also added to the areas for improvement to take account of the needs of a new staff to ensure their induction. Each aspect is matched to timed targets and measurable outcomes. The individual actions provide clear expectations of staff and focus appropriately on improving the quality of teaching so that pupils' progress is accelerated and standards rise. There remains a lack of clarity about who will monitor the school's progress towards good provision. Those responsible for the evaluation of the school's success have not been identified.

You have rightly identified the need to keep a close scrutiny of pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Meetings to consider pupils' progress have been scheduled and opportunities for additional examination will be included in phase meetings. Teachers' assessments of pupils are checked both within the school and by external expertise to ensure accuracy. In addition, you have presented a transparent intention to set targets for pupils' progress as part of teachers' performance management. You are aware of those groups of pupils making less than expected progress and areas of the curriculum that are taught with less secure subject knowledge. You have provided a substantial range of training to reinforce your expectations and equip staff with the necessary skills. Regular, weekly training events are planned to build secure platforms of expertise. Two teaching assistants will shortly embark on accredited training to better support those pupils with special educational needs.

You have begun the new school year with a positive outlook and a clear intention to develop a good education for the pupils. Nevertheless, you are well aware of the work that needs to be done; the weaknesses that need to be addressed; and the ongoing hard work necessary to ensure rapid improvement. You are not yet supported by a substantive leadership team and although this is an urgent issue, it is necessary to identify and appoint individuals exhibiting the right calibre and expertise.

The National Leader for Governance is adept at scrutinising quality and insisting that all governors consider their skills, knowledge and ability to fulfil roles. An action plan to improve governance has been drawn up to establish clear roles and provide necessary training. It is intended that each area for improvement in the school action plan will have a named, link governor to track the school's progress and report back to the governing body. A schedule of meetings has been established along with a new structure of governor committees.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority school improvement advisor (SIA) has quickly established a line of support for the school. She is well aware of the historical context, the unresolved issues and the determined ambition demonstrated by you and the staff. Weekly visits are planned by the SIA to keep the school's progress under close scrutiny. The local authority has brokered good quality support from Moor Hall Primary School and this partnership is working well.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham Local Authority.

Yours sincerely

Deana Holdaway
Her Majesty's Inspector