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Lynn Dunn
Headteacher
Bhylls Acre Primary School
Bhylls Lane
Castlecroft
Wolverhampton
WV3 8DZ

Dear Mrs Dunn

Special measures monitoring inspection of Bhylls Acre Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 1 October 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 March 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you as headteacher and with the attendance officer. I met with the Vice Chair of the Governing Body and five other governors. In addition, I met with a representative from the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plans were evaluated. Students' work in reading, writing and mathematics was sampled and, jointly with you, I made short visits to classrooms.

Context

The previous headteacher left at the end of the spring term, shortly after the school's previous section 5 inspection. The governing body appointed an interim headteacher for the summer term. One member of staff has left the school and two have joined, including a new headteacher.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The local authority's statement of action identifies appropriate support to improve teaching, behaviour, standards in reading, writing and mathematics, and leadership, including governance. The impact of the support provided by the local authority since the school was placed in special measures has been limited. Some deep-seated problems in the school have not been fully addressed and many of the targets for improvement have not been met. For example, the target of 60% of teaching to be good or better by July 2014 has not been achieved.

Widespread underachievement remains throughout the school in reading, writing and mathematics because of persistent weaknesses in teaching. A review of pupils' reading, writing and mathematics books showed that pupils do not make enough progress in these subjects. Unvalidated results at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2014 show that, in Year 6, a quarter of pupils did not make the expected progress in reading. Current information held by leaders also shows that too few pupils are making the progress expected of them. Progress made by the youngest pupils in early reading is weak. This is because phonics (the sounds that letters make) is not systematically taught. Visits to classrooms confirmed that teachers' knowledge of how to teach this aspect of reading is poor. Weak teaching persists because insufficient attention has been paid to delivering high-quality training to improve teachers' skills in the teaching of reading and writing. You have rightly planned training to update teachers' skills in teaching phonics to tackle this problem.

Governance has not improved. A scrutiny of the minutes of the last meeting of the full governing body shows that governors are beginning to ask challenging questions. However, they too readily accept information given by leaders. For example, when questions were raised regarding improving poor behaviour in the classroom, the reply from a school leader was, 'It was difficult to stop low levels of disruption but the aim was to make the lessons more challenging so that pupils are engaged.' Members of the governing body do not have a clear picture of the quality of teaching and learning across the school. This is mainly because teachers' work is not checked regularly enough and the governing body does not receive frequent, detailed reports on the quality of teaching. Governors have been slow to implement all of the changes required from the previous inspection, particularly in relation to improving the effectiveness of governance. It is unacceptable that an external review of governance has not yet taken place, as recommended in the inspection of March 2014. The local authority should consider making full use of its powers to strengthen the governance of the school.

You are very new in post as headteacher, as are other members of the senior leadership team in their roles. A list of responsibilities is being drawn up, setting out

who is responsible for different aspects of improvement. You have rightly prioritised a series of actions where a number of 'quick wins' can be secured. For example, you have established basic routines for entering and leaving the building at the beginning and end of the school day. Your insistence that teachers' implement the behaviour policy consistently is showing early signs of improved behaviour. You have rightly focused on increasing the scope, frequency and quality of checks on teaching. This is helping to establish a secure baseline for improvement and to evaluate the early signs of impact of the actions taken to improve teaching, such as the introduction of a series of 'non-negotiable' elements to teachers' marking and planning. Currently, teachers' marking of pupils' work is frequently too positive or incorrect, showing teachers' weak knowledge of grammar and punctuation. Some teachers with extra responsibility for subjects do not have the necessary skills to check the quality of teaching in sufficient detail or to help teachers become more effective in their subject. It is clear from my discussions with you that you have accepted the areas for improvement identified in the inspection and understand that these weaknesses must be tackled as a matter of urgency. You are rightly updating your plans for improvement because the current plans are not helpful tools to enable you to eradicate the deep-seated weaknesses that led to the school being placed in special measures.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

- The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.
- The school's improvement plan is not 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 Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector

CC

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- For the Secretary of State use the following email address:
CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk