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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 4–5 November 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 November 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 (IEB) and the Director of Children's Services for Walsall.

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching to be at least good by ensuring teachers:
 - assess accurately pupils' learning in order to plan and adapt lessons that match their abilities
 - have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly the more able
 - provide a brisker start to lessons and deploy teaching assistants more effectively to support pupils' learning
 - provide activities that better hold the interest and attention of pupils
 - correct pupils' mistakes in punctuation, spelling and basic grammar consistently.
- Raise achievement in mathematics and in writing by ensuring that:
 - pupils are fully challenged in the tasks they are given and are provided with suitable opportunities to investigate and learn for themselves, particularly the more able
 - pupils understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
 - pupils are provided with ample opportunities to practise and develop their basic skills in grammar, punctuation, spelling and writing at length across a range of subjects
 - pupils are taught basic mathematical concepts so they can reason logically and solve mathematical problems
 - gaps in attainment are closed rapidly for pupils supported through pupil premium and for those with special educational needs when compared with other pupils in the school.
- Improve the quality and impact of leadership and management, including governance, by ensuring that:
 - the governing body has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, especially the achievement of different groups of pupils, and provides rigorous challenge that effectively holds senior leaders to account
 - the governing body reviews regularly all required statutory policies
 - leaders at all levels consistently check on the quality of teaching and provide feedback that helps teachers to improve their lessons
 - leaders are more effective in sharing the good practice that exists in the school
 - senior leaders use accurate assessments to track the progress of different groups of pupils in order to identify and tackle any underachievement and hold teachers to account for the progress of the pupils in their classes.

An external review of governance should be undertaken, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 4–5 November 2014

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, your senior leadership team, the Chair of the IEB, members of the teaching and support staff, and spoke to a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I took account of the 88 responses to the school's questionnaire to parents and of the 37 staff questionnaires. There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for these to be considered. Twelve lessons were observed, two jointly with you, in Years 3, 4, 5 and 6. During these observations I spoke to pupils about their learning and assessed the work in their books. I also scrutinised a range of documentation including the school's analysis of pupils' current attainment, progress and attendance, monitoring records of the quality of teaching undertaken by school leaders, and the minutes of IEB meetings. Additional documentation was evaluated, including the vetting checks on staff new to the school.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in July 2014, one member of the teaching staff has left the school, three have resigned and leave the school at the end of the autumn term, the literacy and numeracy coordinators have relinquished their positions and an IEB has replaced the governing body. The substantive headteacher has not returned to the school. The deputy headteacher remains as acting headteacher. Two full-time and three part-time teachers have joined the school, teaching in Years 3, 4 and 5.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils leaving the school at the end of Year 6 in 2014 made better progress in reading and mathematics and similar progress in writing than those leaving the school in 2013. However, overall progress and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 remain below national figures. This is particularly the case for more-able pupils as significantly fewer than expected achieved higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Girls' achievement was better than boys' in reading, writing and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils made less progress than other pupils and were below national figures in reading. However, disadvantaged pupils' attainment in writing, mathematics, spelling punctuation and grammar was better than similar students nationally. Pakistani pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was well below Pakistani pupils' attainment nationally. However, Indian and Bangladeshi pupils' attainment in the three areas was better than national figures.

Pupils' achievement in spelling, punctuation and grammar, including at the higher levels, was above national figures.

The school's latest information on pupils' attainment in Years 3, 4 and 5, lessons observed during the inspection and the standard of work in pupils' books show that, in writing and mathematics, standards are rising and that pupils are making faster progress than they were when the school was judged to require special measures. However, school leaders, including the Chair of the IEB, recognise that the rate of pupils' progress needs to be quicker in all subjects.

The quality of teaching

Pupils' attainment is improving because the quality of teaching is improving. The scrutiny of pupils' books indicated that their needs are met when teachers' lesson planning is informed by what pupils know, understand and can do. In the best lessons, teachers use a range of appropriate tasks, make the learning intentions clear and regularly check pupils' understanding. Teachers change the lesson if pupils do not understand the work or need to move on to more challenging activities. However, not all teachers frequently check pupils' understanding during or after the lesson. As a consequence, pupils in these groups, especially those that are more able, do not make fast enough progress. The majority of teachers provide written feedback that helps pupils improve their work. School leaders are aware, however, that there is still much to do to ensure all teachers' comments consistently support and develop pupils' learning.

The teaching and assessment of spelling, punctuation and grammar have improved. This is reflected in pupils' achievement in this area at the end of Year 6. As a consequence, pupils' writing in English is more sophisticated because pupils use a range of vocabulary and increasingly complex sentence structures. However, the quality of writing in topic work and science is less well developed.

Pupils' reading skills are not developing fast enough. Pupils have limited opportunities to read in lessons and teachers do not consistently check that pupils understand what they have read. Pupils say that they do not read widely or often in school or at home. They also stated that while they visit the library during lesson times, they are unable to do so at lunchtime as it is closed.

Teaching assistants are used effectively in the classroom and make a valuable contribution to improving pupils' learning. They do this by encouraging pupils to think carefully about their work and to solve problems for themselves. However, when leading small group work, some teaching assistants do not have the necessary English language skills to develop pupils' writing, reading and comprehension.

Work in pupils' mathematics books shows that pupils' needs are met through a range of activities that cover all aspects of the subject, such as number, shape and

data handling. However, pupils who are not selected to join the mathematics intervention group for more-able pupils in Years 5 and 6 do not have enough opportunities to try more challenging work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils learn in lessons because they have positive attitudes and are engaged and interested in what they are doing. Pupils are safe in school as they behave well when moving around the buildings and playgrounds at break and at lunchtime. When asked, the vast majority of pupils said they feel safe in school and know how to keep themselves safe in different situations, including resisting the attempts of others to persuade them to act in a way that is anti-social or unlawful. The pupils' toilets are clean, hygienic and free from graffiti. Pupils value and respect the school's facilities, resources and wall displays.

The school actively promotes British values through the range of subjects and a programme of assemblies and extra-curricular activities. At the time of the inspection, pupils were given the responsibility of selling poppies for Remembrance Day.

Pupils' attendance, at 97%, remains above national figures.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since the inspection in November 2013, there has been uncertainty about the position of the substantive headteacher and of the governing body. These issues have now been resolved. The IEB was established in July 2014 and has acted quickly in challenging school leaders to accelerate improvements. The acting headteacher now has the go-ahead to put in place a revised leadership structure.

Teachers' performance and the quality of pupils' learning are frequently monitored and evaluated. Actions taken to challenge teachers' underperformance are swift and appropriate. The appraisal of staff is now more robust and teachers are appropriately held to account for pupils' progress. As a result, a number of staff have chosen to leave the school or relinquish their positions of responsibility.

Leaders have revised the programme of taught subjects and it meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. They are considering their preferred approach to assessment without levels.

Training for staff focuses on the school's priorities, for example improving pupils' writing skills and the feedback pupils receive to improve their work. However, leaders are aware that inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching and, consequently, pupils' progress. Leaders and teachers have been frustrated that the

advice and guidance provided by the local authority have not been consistent. They state that this has slowed down the rate of pupils' progress.

The IEB has a sound understanding of the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. They support leaders in tackling the underperformance of teachers and in appointing new teachers and leaders. Essential policies have been reviewed and safeguarding checks meet current requirements. The IEB and school leaders ensure that pupils are prepared for life in modern Britain through assemblies, an appropriate broad and balanced curriculum and the values which run through the life of the school.

External support

The delay in establishing the IEB has meant that school leaders have not been adequately supported and challenged. As a consequence, inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching and in pupils' achievement. These are now being confronted with greater urgency.

The local authority has provided workforce and financial support services in resolving the issues around the school's leadership. Consultants have been commissioned by the local authority to support the school in improving teaching, assessment and leadership and management. However, school leaders and teachers said that the advice and guidance have not always been appropriate or helpful, and occasionally contradictory.

The school is working with Park Hall Junior School and Blackwood School to provide support for the acting headteacher and to develop the skills of the staff in teaching more-able pupils.