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13 November 2014

Elizabeth Gallagher
Headteacher
Elms Farm Community Primary School
Dorncliffe Avenue
Sheldon
Birmingham
B33 0PJ

Dear Mrs Gallagher

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Elms Farm Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in October 2013. 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 the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Philip Jarrett
Additional Inspector

The post-inspection letter is copied as appropriate to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body or equivalent
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is always good or better by ensuring that:
 - teachers match work in lessons to pupils' individual needs, especially to extend learning for more-able pupils
 - pupils are given enough time to get on with activities or work by themselves
 - teachers question pupils skilfully to check how well they are doing in lessons and make adjustments to teaching when necessary.

- Improve progress in reading, writing and mathematics for all groups of pupils by giving them:
 - regular opportunities to use and apply their reading, writing and mathematical skills in a range of subjects
 - time to respond to comments in teachers' marking so that they can understand how to improve their work.

- Ensure leaders and governors accelerate the pace of improvement by:
 - using information from checks on teaching more rigorously to improve the quality of teaching, with a greater emphasis on its impact on learning and progress
 - giving governors the training they need to fully understand performance data and challenge leaders over the results
 - analysing in detail the impact of pupil premium spending on eligible pupils' progress and making adjustments where needed as a result.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 12 November 2014

Evidence

On this second monitoring inspection, the inspector met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. The inspector also held meetings with the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and the headteacher of one of the schools providing support. The inspector had a telephone discussion with the local authority's School Improvement Adviser. In addition, the inspector scrutinised current school documentation such as action plans, minutes of meetings of the IEB, and monitoring reports on the quality of teaching and learning. He also observed four lessons jointly with senior leaders and checked the single central record of safeguarding data. The monitoring inspection concentrated on the school's progress against the three areas of weakness identified in the section 5 inspection report. The inspector made an earlier visit on 8 October which focused on support for English.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, five new teachers have joined the school, including two newly qualified teachers. The school has appointed a new curriculum leader for mathematics but has not yet been able to appoint a subject leader for English. Pupil numbers have risen significantly. For example, 20% of the current Year 6 cohort have joined the school since the beginning of Year 5.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The newly constituted senior leadership team has clarified roles and responsibility. The headteacher and deputy headteacher work well together and provide complementary skills. There is a clear sense of direction, with all staff working towards common objectives. The IEB has already begun to provide support and challenge to the school's senior leaders. The headteacher is set specific targets and tasked with writing detailed reports for each meeting. The IEB has reviewed progress since the previous inspection, explored the performance data, and audited and reviewed policies.

The senior leaders are well focused on the key issues from the previous inspection report, particularly teaching and learning. Joint lesson observations confirm that senior leaders have an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses in teaching. The school has worked closely with the support schools to improve teaching. Strategies used have included: visits to other schools; joint lesson observation and learning walks; team teaching; external and in-school training; and regular opportunities to discuss pupils' work. These efforts to improve the quality of teaching, focusing particularly on standards in English, led to some improvements in attainment in 2014 in reading and writing, although performance in mathematics was not as strong. The school has now appointed a subject leader for mathematics with specialist subject

knowledge and good experience of training. The school's current assessments suggest that the improvement in achievement will continue in 2015.

Training has been provided for middle leadership, with the emphasis on improving communication, more effective monitoring and evaluation, and analysing performance data. There is a good programme of support for newly qualified teachers and specific coaching is provided for those teachers considered to require improvement.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- A clear emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning, working closely with the support school in areas such as planning, the clarity of learning objectives, and matching work to pupils' different capabilities
- A revised policy on marking and feedback that encourages pupils to respond to the teacher's comments and corrections
- Greater emphasis on using topics from the wider curriculum to develop pupils' literacy skills beyond English
- Improvements in writing, including greater emphasis on extended writing across a range of subjects
- The introduction of a writing book for pupils that contains all their English work and writing generated in other subjects, leading to improved standards of presentation
- More positive attitudes to writing from pupils as a result of strategies such as regular writing competitions, more opportunities to write at home, and the establishment of a writing group for gifted and talented pupils
- Enhanced opportunities for teachers to assess, moderate and standardise pupils' work
- Regular pupil progress meetings involving all teaching staff and classes
- The effective use of formal, termly reviews of teaching and learning by the Teaching School and local authority to provide an overview of strengths and areas for development.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Continuing variability in the quality of teaching and marking across the school.

External support

Support from the local authority is based on its statement of action, which has been regularly and effectively revised to reflect the school's changing needs. A Teaching School manages the process and monitors developments, while a second school provides day-to-day support and guidance. The time available for the support school has been increased to one and a half days a week. The IEB, which meets monthly, has a good range of appropriate experience. Regular half-termly meetings of a Monitoring Task Force ensure effective communication between the different agencies and the process is well managed. Roles and responsibilities are clear. Staff

have generally welcomed the range of support provided, especially the opportunities for regular meetings with teachers from the other schools.