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18 December 2014

David Brown  
Executive Headteacher  
Al-Hijrah School  
Cherrywood Centre  
Burbidge Road  
Birmingham  
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Dear Mr Brown

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Al-Hijrah School**

Following my visit with James McNeillie, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Chris Chapman, Associate Inspector, to your school on 16–17 December 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 December 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

Rachel Howie  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching by making sure that:
  - the work pupils are given to do in all year groups and in all subjects is accurately and consistently matched to their needs and abilities
  - teachers use assessment data accurately to plan for pupils' next steps in their learning
  - disabled pupils and those with special educational needs receive appropriate support in lessons
  - teachers have access to and use the resources that they need to teach the whole curriculum, engage pupils' interest and help them make good progress.
  
- Improve the progress of pupils in the primary school by:
  - ensuring teaching programmes are pitched at the appropriate level for pupils of different needs and abilities and sequentially build on their skills year-on-year
  - identifying where there are gaps in pupils' learning and taking urgent and effective action to close them
  - urgently agreeing an action plan for improving pupils' writing skills.
  
- Improve behaviour and safety by:
  - developing strategies to tackle bullying and poor behaviour and train staff in their implementation
  - making sure all staff have high expectations of good behaviour
  - ensuring staff model good behaviour and respect for all pupils at all times
  - making sure that pupils consistently experience teaching that motivates them and leads to better attitudes to learning.
  
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers, including governors, by:
  - ensuring that tracking and monitoring procedures are systematic and enable leaders to check that pupils are making sufficient progress
  - ensuring that procedures to identify and support disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are robust and that action taken to support these pupils is more effective
  - providing middle leaders with the professional development needed to carry out their roles effectively and establishing a framework that will enable them to check the quality of teaching in their subjects
  - improving the curriculum across the school so that it better meets the needs of all pupils, provides more varied and interesting activities, ensures a better balance between the time allocated to English and mathematics and other subjects and offers more option choices for older pupils
  - using the additional funding for primary sport more effectively
  - ensuring that the governing body's work is informed by a clear and well directed vision, that it develops a strategic role and holds leaders to account for their actions
  - ensuring finances are managed appropriately, effectively and efficiently

implementing the recommendations arising from the recent audit of governance.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 16–17 December 2014**

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher and the senior leadership team, two members of the interim executive board (IEB), the consultant headteacher working in the primary phase, three representatives from the local authority and teachers with additional responsibilities. Inspectors also spoke to a group of pupils, to pupils informally around the school and in classrooms, and to parents at the end of the school day. Inspectors visited lessons and scrutinised school documents, including those relating to behaviour, attendance and the quality of teaching.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection in June, 15 members of staff have left the school and 16 new members have been appointed. The deputy headteacher, removed from his post by the previous governors, has returned to his role as acting headteacher. The senior leader, who was fulfilling this role temporarily, has returned to his position as assistant headteacher. Members of staff from Calthorpe School continue to support staff at Al-Hijrah. Several staff members from Calthorpe are filling senior leadership posts on a temporary basis. A consultant headteacher has been contracted to work one day each week in the primary phase. Two members of staff are on long-term sick leave.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

At the end of Key Stage 2 in 2014, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected level in reading and writing was slightly above the national average and slightly below in mathematics. Significantly more pupils attained the higher Level 5 in writing than was the case nationally. However, there is a three-year declining trend in the reading, writing and mathematics results. There has been no external validation of the writing results, which are based on teacher assessment. The proportion of pupils making the progress that is expected of them in reading, writing and mathematics from Key Stage 1 to the end of Key Stage 2 compares favourably with the national figures.

At the end of Key Stage 1 in 2014, an above-average proportion of pupils attained the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics and an above-average proportion attained the higher Level 3 in reading. Almost all pupils met the required standard in the most recent check in phonics (the sounds letters make). This is because the teaching of phonics is good in Year 1.

Results submitted to the local authority, based on teachers' assessments, show that an above-average proportion of pupils reached the expected standard at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. There has been no external validation of this data. School records indicate that pupils currently in the Early Years Foundation Stage are

not all making good progress. This is as a result of variation in the quality of teaching.

Test results and teacher assessments indicate that, throughout the primary phase, boys are attaining less well than girls in reading and writing.

When the current leadership team arrived at the school, there was no data available for primary-aged pupils currently in the school. While leaders now have increasingly accurate information about how well pupils are attaining, they have not yet made a full analysis of pupils' progress over time. Evidence from pupils' books shows that progress, while improving, remains inconsistent between classes and subjects.

Achievement at the end of Key Stage 4 is strong. At the end of 2014, the proportion of pupils attaining five A\* to C grades was above the national average, as was the proportion of pupils making the expected amount of progress. However, the attainment gap between girls and boys was too wide; girls outperformed boys, particularly in English and languages. This is as a result of variations in the quality of teaching. Achievement in humanities, design technology, art and physical education was less strong. Early indications, based on the school's tracking information, are that the areas of strength will be sustained and improvement in many of the weaker areas will be seen.

### **The quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching is improving, however inconsistencies remain between classes, subjects and year groups. Teaching is more consistent in the secondary phase than in the primary.

All teachers are acutely aware of the need to ensure that pupils of different abilities receive work that is sufficiently challenging. Planning shows that teachers take this into consideration. However, not all teachers are skilled at ensuring that the different tasks they provide build on what pupils already know and can do. Such inconsistencies were particularly evident in the primary classrooms. In contrast, in several of the secondary classes, teachers used information from their marking to plan effectively for the students' next steps in learning.

An increasing number of resources are being made available for teachers to use to support their teaching. For example, computing equipment, text books, reading books and mathematical resources have been purchased. However, the availability of resources, particularly for the primary curriculum and secondary physical education lessons, remain a limiting factor in the degree to which pupils can fully access and engage with all areas of the curriculum.

Questioning is an area in need of improvement across the school. Teachers do not use questions skilfully enough to get pupils to think carefully. Pupils are not asked follow-up questions that require them to explain their answers. Teachers often ask

questions that require a one-word answer and, on occasions, teachers answer the question themselves. This limits the progress that pupils make.

Pupils' progress in writing in the primary phase is improving. This is because there is an effective improvement plan in place. The weekly 'Big Write' lessons provide pupils with an opportunity to complete extended pieces of writing on a subject that interests them. Opportunities have increased for pupils to practise their writing skills in subjects other than English. Particularly good practice was seen in Year 4 topic books. The introduction of a new literacy scheme has helped teachers to plan writing lessons more effectively. However, in some classes, pupils do not practise their writing regularly enough in their literacy lessons. This prevents them from making as much progress as they could. School leaders have identified a weakness in handwriting and presentation across the school and have very recently set out clear expectations for pupils. It is too soon to see any improvements.

Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is weak. This is partly as a result of under-resourced classrooms and outdoor learning areas. In addition, the nature of the building does not lend itself to easy access to the outdoor learning environment. Weaknesses also exist as a result of teachers' lack of expertise in creating effective learning opportunities for early years' children. Children have too few opportunities to explore ideas for themselves and make decisions about their own learning.

Where teaching is most effective, the objective of the lesson is clear and pupils understand what they need to do to be successful. Teachers' marking celebrates what has been completed well and provides pupils with clear guidance about what to do next or how to improve. Pupils then respond to the teachers' guidance and, as a result, make good progress. In some classes, teachers are successful in enabling pupils to assess their own work and find out for themselves how to make improvements.

Where teaching is less effective, time is not used well. For example, in one lesson, pupils were observed to spend time unnecessarily copying down sentences from the whiteboard. In another, the teacher spent too long reminding pupils about the previous learning. This slowed down the progress of all pupils in the class. In addition, teaching assistants are not always used to best effect. This is often because they are not clear about what pupils should achieve during the lesson. Some do not have the subject knowledge to help the pupils to make good progress.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Behaviour is improving. Evidence from lesson observations, and from the records kept by the school, shows that incidences of disruptive and anti-social behaviour have reduced since July 2014. This is because teachers have higher expectations, are becoming more proactive in using the 'e-praise' system and have received training in the use of more positive language to encourage good behaviour. However, some incidences of low-level misbehaviour remain. This was most evident

during the inspection, and from leaders' records, with regard to the poor attitude to learning of some boys. With the exception of Year 9, girls' attitudes to learning are largely positive. Bullying records and discussions with pupils show that incidences of bullying are reducing. In addition, pupils have a better understanding of what constitutes bullying and how this differs from unkindness and disagreements. The pupils who spoke to inspectors said that they trust the adults to deal with any concerns they may have. They stated that they feel safe at school.

Overall attendance is in line with the national average. The last monitoring inspection reported the weaker attendance of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. These pupils' attendance has improved.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

The executive headteacher and the senior leaders are a cohesive team. They have a shared vision for the school and are under no illusion about the enormity of the task facing them in ensuring the school is removed from special measures in the allocated timescale. Their approach to school improvement is characterised by determination, energy and optimism. They have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Many of the leadership positions are held by staff from Calthorpe School and consultants. While this is proving effective in the short term, the long-term plans for permanent leadership remain unresolved.

As a result of effective coaching and training, teaching is improving. Lesson observations during the inspection confirm that teachers are using what they have learned to help pupils to make better progress. Some are more skilled at this than others and, as a result, inconsistencies remain. Staff are keen to improve their practice and the members of staff who spoke with inspectors were positive about the improvements being made in the school and have confidence in the leaders. Similarly, all parents who spoke to inspectors were complimentary about the school's work. They praised leaders and teachers for being visible and accessible at the end of each school day.

As a result of effective training, middle leaders in the secondary phase are becoming more effective in leading the areas for which they are responsible. Middle leaders have yet to be identified in the primary school. This is slowing the rate at which improvements can be made.

By setting appropriate performance management targets and introducing regular pupil progress meetings, leaders have ensured that all teachers are aware of their responsibility to make certain that pupils make at least the expected progress. Training has been provided for all staff to better support disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. School tracking information about secondary students shows that an increasing proportion of these pupils are making the progress that is expected.

Leaders make regular checks on the quality of teaching and provide staff with helpful feedback. Where these checks identify areas of weakness, teachers are provided with additional support. A further check is made to ensure that improvements have been made. However, leaders do not always draw together the range of information they collect about the quality of teaching or record it systematically to provide a thorough evaluation of the quality of teaching over time.

A new topic-based primary curriculum has been introduced. Pupils told inspectors that learning is now more interesting and fun. There is an improving balance between subject areas; however, pupils do not have enough opportunities to learn about faiths other than Islam. This is because there is no strategic plan in place for this. Option choices for older students have not changed since the inspection in December 2013 and remain narrow.

The current leaders and IEB members informed inspectors that, on taking over the school, they were unable to find complete records pertaining to personnel, payroll, performance management, pupils' progress in the primary phase or any evidence of a coherent, consistent financial reporting and recording system. They have been swift to act to ensure that these systems are now in place. Irregularities and inequalities were identified within staff contracts and salary grades. The IEB have ensured that all contracts have been reissued in accordance with Birmingham City Council guidelines.

During an audit of the deficit budget, a number of financial irregularities were discovered. The IEB have responded quickly to this in a number of ways. They have reviewed a number of contracts and sought more cost-effective alternatives. They are conducting thorough investigations into all anomalies and have put appropriate budgetary controls and financial systems in place. The school's substantial budget deficit, which was inherited by the IEB, remains a key issue that is yet to be fully resolved. The local authority are in the process of verifying the exact amount and identifying precisely how this deficit has been amassed. They have an appropriate plan in place to ensure that the school can run on the allocated annual budget as soon as possible. Uncertainty around the rental agreement with the Trust for the use of the buildings remains. The IEB and the local authority are taking appropriate action to resolve this issue.

A significant portion of the inspection was taken up in ensuring that appropriate checks had been carried out on all staff. A considerable number of administrative errors were evident on the record of these checks. This had not been identified by the executive headteacher or the IEB. By the end of the inspection, inspectors were satisfied that all the required information was available via the local authority human resources department, which is responsible for carrying out and recording the checks.



## **External support**

The local authority continues to tackle the range of complex and sensitive issues surrounding this school. A school improvement officer is providing effective support to the primary phase. The executive headteacher, brokered by the local authority, is providing clear leadership. It is unclear precisely how the local authority will hold the school to account for the pace of the improvements being made.

The senior leaders from Calthorpe School are providing a broad range of effective support. They have been fully accepted by the staff at the school and are working diligently to make the improvements necessary. Some of the improvement work that is required in the primary phase is outside their areas of expertise.

The consultant headteacher providing support in the primary school has a clear understanding of the areas in need of improvement and is providing effective training and coaching for those leaders with less primary experience.