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Sally Baker
Acting Headteacher
Cape Primary School
Cape Hill
Smethwick
B66 4SH

Dear Miss Baker

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Cape Primary School

Following my visit with Carol Deakin and Michael Onyon, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 25–26 February 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because the Chief Inspector was concerned about aspects of the quality of leadership and management (including governance) at the school.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a wide range of documentation including, the single central register; records relating to behaviour, exclusions and attendance; pupils' books; minutes from governors' meetings; correspondence from governors and school policies. Observations of teaching and learning were carried out jointly with the acting headteacher and deputy headteacher. Inspectors met with senior and middle leaders, groups of teachers and teaching assistants, a group of pupils, a representative from the local authority, two groups of governors and the acting headteacher's mentor. Additionally, inspectors spoke to parents as they dropped their children off at school and with pupils in classrooms and during lunchtimes. A telephone conversation was held with the director of children's services for Sandwell. The 62 responses to staff questionnaires were considered as part of the inspection

Context

This is a larger than average primary school. The large majority of pupils come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds including Pakistani, Indian, African, Caribbean and Bangladeshi. A very small proportion of pupils are White British. A much higher than

average proportion of pupils join and leave the school other than at the normal times. Many of these pupils arrive at the school with little or no English language development. Seven out of ten pupils in the school do not speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding (government funding for pupils who are eligible for free school meals or who are in the care of the local authority) is double the national average. The proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is in line with the national average.

The headteacher left the school in July 2014 and an acting headteacher, who was previously the deputy headteacher, and acting deputy headteacher, who was previously the assistant headteacher, have been in place since September 2014. A new chair of governors was appointed in September 2014.

The governors have advertised on four occasions for a substantive headteacher but have not been able to make an appointment.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, with effective support from other leaders, have maintained the effective leadership that was reported in the previous inspection in 2013. Senior leaders, many quite new to their role, have developed quickly into a cohesive team with a shared vision for the school. A culture of high expectation is evident throughout the school. The extremely positive response to the staff questionnaire shows that staff share this vision and are united behind the school leaders. The parents who spoke to inspectors are supportive of the school's work and report that leaders and teachers are approachable, take time to listen and take action with regard to concerns they raise. The school's recent survey of parents mirrors this view.

The acting headteacher has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school development plan appropriately focuses on the areas that need to improve and identifies who will lead the actions to be taken. The plan does not include detailed timescales about the completion of the actions. Governors are not sufficiently involved in making checks on how effective the actions are on improving outcomes for pupils.

Rigorous procedures are in place to keep pupils safe and thorough records are kept, for example, those relating to checks made on adults' suitability to work with children. Leaders have considered specific aspects of child protection that may have relevance in this school. For example, teaching staff have received training on the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations and can talk about this with confidence. Attendance continues to improve, although it remains below the national average for primary schools. The number of pupils who are persistently absent is reducing. This is because the procedures in place to follow up absences are rigorous. However, the target currently set for attendance is too low.

Leaders undertake regular checks on the quality of teaching and provide teachers with helpful feedback. These checks include looking at pupils' books and scrutinising planning documents. This ensures that leaders judge teaching based on a range of information. Not all leaders are equally skilled at ensuring that their checks focus enough on how much progress different groups of pupils are making. Challenging performance management targets are in place for teachers. In order to support teachers to improve their practice, leaders provide individual coaching. This is effective in improving the quality of teaching. Progression through the pay scale is appropriately linked to the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.

Regular checks are made on the progress that pupils are making. This ensures that pupils who are at risk of falling behind are identified quickly. The assessments that teachers make about pupils' progress are checked within school and are also compared with other local schools to ensure that they are accurate. The progress of different groups of pupils is carefully analysed to ensure they make at least the progress that is expected. The end of year data for 2014 has been thoroughly analysed. The leaders are acutely aware of the drop in results at the end of Key Stage 2. Their analysis correctly identifies the significant impact of one fifth of the pupils in Year 6 having special educational needs and almost half the pupils having arrived part way through Key Stage 2, many with little or no English.

The curriculum has been revised to meet the current government requirements. It includes planned opportunities for pupils to learn about British values. The range of trips to places of interest, visitors to the school, after school clubs and specialist music teaching make a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is a strength of the school. Pupils spoke proudly about their school to inspectors and were enthusiastic about the range of experiences that they enjoy. They explained that adults expect them to work hard and behave well and that school is a safe and fun place to learn and play. Pupils stated that they trust adults to deal with any unacceptable behaviour, but that pupils generally get along with one another well. School records, which are carefully analysed, verify that incidents of poor behaviour, including those of a racist nature, are rare.

Governance is an area of significant concern. Evidence, from this inspection and from the external review of governance, shows that there is a significant rift within the governing body. This lack of unity is preventing governors from focussing on their core responsibilities. A number of governors have become preoccupied with procedural matters, for instance agreeing meeting minutes and agenda items, and these issues have taken priority in meetings instead of the business of improving the school. Some governors are knowledgeable about the schools' areas of strength and weakness and understand what leaders are doing to make improvements. However, their capacity to adequately support and challenge the school is limited because discussions in meetings become heated, and in some instances unprofessional. As a result, meetings are often unproductive. All governors, spoken to by inspectors, agree that governance is dysfunctional.

External support

The local authority has provided appropriate support for this school. A mentor was appointed to support the acting headteacher when it became clear she would be in post longer than had first been anticipated. A 'pre-warning' notice was sent to the school in October to raise the local authority's concerns regarding the drop in standards at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2014 and the lack of unity within the governing body. A review of teaching and learning at the school was conducted in response to the drop in standards. The report provided by the local authority advisor was clear and concise and provided appropriate next steps for the school leaders to work on. The local authority also arranged for an external review of governance to be completed at the end of January. At the time of the inspection the full governing body had not been informed of the outcome of the review. This was due to happen the week following this inspection. However, the concerns raised by the review had, quite rightly, been shared with the Chair of Governors who is working with the local authority to find solutions.

Priorities for further improvement

- As a matter of extreme urgency, the local authority must secure effective governance for the school.
- Secure substantive leadership for the school.
- Include more precise timescales in the school development plan and ensure governors are included in making checks on the progress of the actions taken.
- Ensure that checks made on teaching focus sufficiently on the progress made by different groups of pupils.
- Ensure that the target set for improving attendance provides a greater level of challenge.

Her Majesty's Inspectors will continue to monitor the school and will consider this is in determining the timing of the next full inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Sandwell, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Regional Schools Commissioner. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Howie
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc Chair of the Governing Body (or equivalent)