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Mrs Tina Dunkley
Headteacher
Palfrey Junior School
Dale Street
Walsall
WS1 4AH

Dear Mrs Dunkley

Special measures monitoring inspection of Palfrey Junior School

Following my visit with Colin Lower, Additional inspector, to your school on 13–14 May 2015, 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 fifth 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 appoint two newly qualified teachers. These teachers should be appointed to a year group containing a teacher whose pupils make expected progress or better, in reading, writing and mathematics.

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 fifth monitoring inspection on 13–14 May 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and a large number of pupils' books, met with the headteacher, members of the leadership team, members of the IEB and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Inspectors took account of the 42 responses to the staff questionnaire. There were too few responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for these to be considered. The views of parents, carers and pupils were taken into account from the school's own questionnaires to parents, carers and pupils. Inspectors observed parts of lessons and intervention groups across all year groups. During these observations, inspectors looked at pupils' work and spoke to them about their learning. The behaviour of pupils was observed as they arrived at the school, at break and lunchtimes, as they left the school premises at the end of the day and in lessons. In addition, inspectors reviewed the information that the school has on pupils' progress, behaviour, punctuality and attendance. Additional documentation was scrutinised, including checks on the quality of learning and teaching, the vetting checks on staff new to the school and the IEB's minutes of meetings. The local authority's written reviews of the school's work and progress were also considered.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in February 2015, a deputy headteacher has started at the school. This appointment completes the new leadership team which now comprises two deputy headteachers, a combined Year 6 and mathematics leader and the headteacher. Staffing instability has been resolved and classes in Year 3 are now taught by full-time appointments.

During this inspection, Year 6 pupils were taking their end-of-key-stage tests.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Since the last monitoring inspection, pupils in Year 6 are making better progress because they are experiencing more effective teaching over time. This is particularly the case in reading. Information provided by the school shows that pupils in Year 6 are making progress broadly in line with the national average. However, progress in writing and mathematics, while improving significantly, is still slightly below national figures. Pupils' reading skills are well developed in all year groups. For example, the reading age of pupils has increased by seven months in Year 4 and one year and two months in Year 3 since September 2014. On average, most pupils in all year groups have a reading age above their chronological age. However, pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils in Year 5 have a reading age below their chronological age.

Pupils' writing skills vary across the school. In Year 4, the majority of pupils are making the progress expected of them. However in Year 3, a large majority of pupils are not making expected progress. In Year 5 and Year 6, a small minority of pupils are not doing well. School leaders are aware of this issue and are concentrating time and resources to improve pupils' writing. The work in pupils' books shows that these interventions are having a positive effect on the quality of pupils' writing, including their spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Pupils' mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding are inconsistent across the school as a result of previous poor teaching. Information provided by the school indicates that a third of the pupils are not making the progress expected of them. The work in pupils' books shows that their understanding of number work, for example multiplication and division, is improving. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of: measurement, for example height and weight; geometry, for example, the properties of shapes, angles and symmetry; and statistics, for example comparing charts and tables. As a consequence, pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding. The recently appointed mathematics coordinator is aware of these issues and has begun to provide appropriate training and support for staff.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved since the inspection in November 2013. As a consequence, more pupils are making better progress, particularly in reading. There is greater consistency in pupils' learning as a result of the reduced number of changes to the staff team, particularly in Year 3. For example, all teachers follow the school's policies on how to tell pupils what they are going to learn and on providing comments on the quality of their work. All books are frequently marked. Teachers and teaching assistants want pupils to do their best and insist on hard work and good behaviour. However, leaders' support and training for staff have not yet resulted in significant and sustained improvements in pupils' standards in all year groups.

Where learning is particularly effective, teachers use their good subject knowledge and accurate assessment of pupils' knowledge and understanding to plan activities that are matched to their abilities and engage their interest and attention. Teaching assistants are used effectively to support pupils' learning and to check pupils' misunderstandings or mistakes. Almost all lessons begin promptly and quickly engage pupils in their learning. The majority of teachers provide pupils with written feedback that helps them to improve their work.

Where learning is limited, teachers have not considered carefully enough what pupils, particularly the more able pupils, need to be able to do and know. As a result, learning activities are not always matched appropriately to their individual

ability levels. In addition, a few teachers do not provide pupils with feedback that helps them to develop their knowledge and understanding.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' conduct in lessons and around the school contributes to a calm and purposeful atmosphere. Relationships among pupils and between staff and pupils are positive. The number of fixed-term exclusions and incidents of low-level disruption are very low. Pupils, parents, carers and staff agree that pupils' behaviour is good almost all of the time. However, when teaching fails to engage pupils' interest their behaviour can deteriorate. A small minority of teachers fail to recognise when they have lost the attention of pupils, particularly during lesson introductions. As a result, pupils become restless, fidgety and lose concentration.

Pupils' attendance is improving. However, the number of pupils who are persistently absent, missing 15% of lessons, remains just above average. This is primarily due to a small number of pupils who have long-term medical issues and a minority of families who take their children on unauthorised holidays during term time.

When asked, the majority of pupils say 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 unlawful or anti-social. Pupils are clear about the different types of bullying and who to go to if they witness bullying. Pupils state that bullying incidents are quickly and effectively dealt with by staff.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since the inspection in November 2013, the school has undergone considerable change. After a slow start, this has been effectively managed by the new headteacher, leadership team and IEB. Leaders have used the appraisal process to appropriately challenge underperformance. As a consequence, some staff have left the school. The staff team is now more stable and no changes are envisaged before the start of the new academic year in September 2015. As a result, approaches to learning and teaching are more consistent and more pupils are making better progress, particularly in reading. All the staff that responded to the staff questionnaire said that they are proud to be a part of the school. Almost all staff agreed that the school is well led and managed. Potential leaders in the school have been identified and receive middle leadership training from Ryders Hayes Teaching School.

Teachers' performance and the quality of pupils' learning are frequently and thoroughly monitored and evaluated. For example, supply teachers covering for absent teachers are quickly removed if they do not provide appropriate support for pupils' learning. Pupils' books are frequently monitored and the findings shared with staff and the IEB. As a result of the checks on teachers' work, leaders have put in

place appropriate training and support for staff that is focused on the school's priorities. However, leaders are aware that inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching and are providing further training for staff and support for pupils, particularly in writing and mathematics.

The school's evaluation is generally accurate and informs action planning that focuses on appropriate priorities to raise standards. Members of the IEB receive information about the work of the school that is clear and detailed.

The IEB, established in July 2014, provides effective support and challenge in equal measure. Members of the IEB have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. The IEB supports leaders in tackling the underperformance of staff and in appointing new teachers and leaders. Essential policies are 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 permeate the life of the school.

External support

The local authority provides appropriate and effective support through an improvement advisor. Training and guidance are appropriate and focused on the school's requirements and priorities. As a result, pupils' learning and standards are improving.

The school works effectively with a range of schools to improve the quality of leadership and management. For example, Ryders Hayes Teaching School is providing training for teachers identified as potential leaders.