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Mr Paul Smith
Acting Headteacher
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Birmingham
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Dear Mr Smith

Special measures monitoring inspection of Springfield Primary School

Following my visit with Michael Appleby, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 16–17 March 2016, 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 that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's post-Ofsted improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham City Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2015.

- In order to ensure pupils achieve well in all year groups, improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good and better by making sure that:
 - all teachers have high expectations of pupils' achievement and plan activities that are suitably challenging for the most-able pupils, those that are disabled and have special educational needs, and those that are in the early stages of learning to speak English
 - activities in all subjects help pupils to practise, extend or learn new skills
 - activities in the Nursery are purposeful and move children's learning on
 - all staff include girls in class discussions and give them time to respond to questions
 - teachers give pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work when marking.
- Improve pupils' behaviour by making sure that:
 - all adults have high expectations of pupils' behaviour, particularly as pupils move around the school and during break times
 - all pupils learn to resolve disagreements without resorting to using inappropriate and hurtful language
 - lunchtime supervisors respond quickly to any concerns pupils may have and encourage pupils to cooperate and play together.
- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by making sure that:
 - all leaders have the skills required to carry out their roles effectively and are held to account for the difference they make to teaching and pupils' achievement
 - leaders effectively check the impact of teachers on the learning of different groups of pupils, and identify the precise actions individual teachers should take to help pupils make rapid progress
 - senior leaders provide governors with pertinent information about the achievement of different groups of pupils, so that governors can effectively hold all senior leaders to account for the progress of different groups of pupils
 - pupil premium funding is specifically targeted at meeting the learning needs of disadvantaged pupils
 - pupils in the Nursery are always taught by a qualified teacher.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 16–17 March 2016

Evidence

In addition to observing lessons, some of them jointly with members of the senior leadership team, inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. Meetings were held with the acting headteacher, the executive headteacher from the external partner (Robin Hood Academy), the deputy headteacher, a consultant headteacher and two assistant headteachers. I met with two members of the interim executive board (IEB), including the chair and held a meeting with representatives of external partners from Robin Hood Academy, the Greet Teaching School Alliance and Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP). Inspectors spoke to parents at the start of the first of two inspection days.

The focus of this monitoring inspection was the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' attainment and progress, and pupils' behaviour and safety. An inspector checked the single central record to ensure that the details for new staff had been added and that the school complies with safeguarding and staff vetting procedures.

Context

There have been significant changes to staffing since the previous monitoring inspection in December 2015. Seven teachers have left and one joined the school in January 2016. Another teacher will be retiring in the summer term and a teacher will be leaving by the end of the summer term. One member of the IEB has resigned and a replacement has been appointed. The executive headteacher of Robin Hood Academy is currently providing part-time oversight of the school's improvement and is working alongside the acting headteacher, who is also the headteacher of Robin Hood Academy. An additional consultant headteacher was appointed by the IEB on a part-time basis to manage staff attendance and to liaise with the local authority's human resources department on matters of staff absence.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Following the slow start reported at the time of the previous monitoring inspection in December 2015, the IEB and senior leaders have put in place more coordinated approaches to improving teaching and learning. They accept that there is a great deal to do to improve teaching and pupils' achievement. Pupils' learning continues to be hampered in those classes where staff are persistently absent. Staff turnover and reduced staff levels are helping to reduce the large budget deficit reported at the time of the previous monitoring inspection. Those teachers and support staff who regularly attend school are very committed to school improvement and are

pulling their weight collectively to improve. It is to their credit that staff morale remains high as they try very hard to improve their own practice for the benefit of the pupils they teach. The appointment of a consultant headteacher who manages staff absence and some complex staffing issues has enabled senior leaders to focus their efforts more than previously on systematic monitoring of lessons and pupils' work. Assessment information is now in place and accessible to leaders and staff so that leaders and teachers are in a stronger position than previously to gauge how much progress pupils make.

At the time of the previous monitoring inspection, the post-Ofsted improvement plan and statement of action submitted by the local authority were not fit for purpose. Both plans have been amended and are now fit for purpose. The local authority commissioned BEP to amend the statement of action. Both action plans now provide a clear route map for improvement with realistic and achievable measures of success and timescales. Senior leaders are better placed to gauge the impact of actions taken to improve teaching. The acting headteacher has also reorganised the way senior leaders monitor and support teachers. There are now clear lines of responsibility and accountability as the deputy headteacher and two assistant headteachers directly manage and oversee improvements to each phase of the school. Reports about the teaching observed by leaders are being monitored and fed back to staff. Although reports about the quality of teaching identify areas for improvement, inspectors found that these were not always followed through; for some staff, the same weaknesses were identified and repeated during subsequent visits to lessons carried out by senior leaders.

External partners from Robin Hood Academy and the Greet Teaching School Alliance are exerting more influence on teachers across the school. As a result, there have been improvements to the way the early years phase of the school is organised with sharper monitoring of teaching in both the Nursery and Reception classes. This has resulted in some improved practice, although, again, staff absence and lack of continuity for Nursery children affects their progress. The teaching in the Nursery remains relatively weaker than in the Reception classes, as reported after the previous monitoring inspection. The teaching in Years 5 and 6 is more consistently effective than in Years 1 to 4, although improvements are now more evident across the school because of the direct involvement and challenge exerted by senior leaders and the IEB.

Since the last monitoring inspection, senior leaders have established what are termed three 'key drivers' for improvement. These drivers focus on distributed leadership, learning outcomes and increased oracy and engagement in lessons. The focus on oracy in particular is having a positive impact on teaching and learning as inspectors found that teachers are now insisting that pupils answer questions fully in complete sentences. There are more opportunities, particularly for the large number of pupils learning to speak English as an additional language, for pupils to discuss their ideas and articulate their thinking. This is improving pupils' speaking and listening skills. This increased use of oracy in lessons has improved the quality

and structure of pupils' writing. Workbooks show that pupils write more often and independently with marked improvements to their handwriting and sentence structure.

Leaders have put in place support plans for teachers to improve their teaching. These plans are adapted and informed by regular monitoring of lessons, teachers' planning and pupils' books. Senior leaders and staff responsible for managing subjects are checking more often that planning is in place and that lessons meet clearly defined minimum standards. Any weak practice is now being identified and a support plan agreed to make sure that teaching improves. Again, the only disruption to this monitoring is staff absenteeism. Nonetheless, when staff return from sick leave, monitoring restarts and picks up any weaknesses so that support plans are now being implemented more effectively than was previously the case. This increased scrutiny of teaching accounts for the high turnover of staff since the previous monitoring inspection, and there are early indications that leaders and the IEB are reducing the amount of weak or ineffective teaching.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The learning observed in lessons, assessments of pupils' progress and the quality of work seen in books show that there is still too much teaching that requires improvement and some that is still inadequate. Nonetheless, external partners and consultants are helping teachers to see and share good practice. The deputy headteacher and assistant headteachers are improving the way they monitor teaching and are starting to offer the right level of support for staff. Inspectors found that teachers and support staff who regularly attend school are improving their practice as there is some consistency now evident in each phase of the school. This is mainly due to the fact that teachers' planning has improved and is more consistent than previously across classes in each year group.

Despite these improvements, there remain some significant weaknesses in teaching. Pupils' work shows that teachers do not always offer the right level of challenge, particularly for the most-able pupils. Too many lessons are taught to the whole class without enough attention given to the different abilities and learning needs of pupils. As a result, pupils who find learning difficult or who have special educational needs or disability are not able to keep up with other pupils because tasks have not been adapted enough for them to improve their learning. Pupils who have special educational needs or disability make more progress when provided with planned intervention work in lessons or when withdrawn to work in smaller groups. The most-able pupils in too many lessons observed by inspectors did not have enough challenging work to move on to when they had completed the set work. In mathematics lessons, for example, pupils with secure mental arithmetic skills are still completing mundane written calculations that are too easy for them; when they complete the tasks set, they wait for the teacher to tell them what to do next because nothing has been planned for them to move on to that offers the right level of challenge.

Assessment information has improved as it now provides an accurate account of pupils' learning and progress. Assessments set out how much progress groups and individual pupils make. Leaders are now much clearer about standards in each year group and use this information to identify pupils who need to catch up. This has helped in particular those pupils with special educational needs or disability as intervention programmes are now much more focused than previously on pupils' additional learning needs.

Teachers' planning, for example, has improved the way English lessons are structured so that pupils are able to speak to other pupils more frequently during lessons to explore ideas and then write with greater clarity and purpose. Pupils' writing is improving as a result.

Teachers' marking has improved and is much more helpful and consistent than previously. Pupils told inspectors that they know what to do next when the teacher has marked their work. There are now clear prompts from teachers and opportunities provided for pupils to correct their work, although in some classes workbooks show that pupils are still not provided with enough extension work to accelerate their progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning and school have improved significantly. All the parents spoken to during the inspection agree. Pupils behave well. They are polite and usually attentive in lessons. In most lessons, pupils discuss and share ideas and this is improving their confidence to speak and listen to other pupils. Pupils say that they feel valued and respected by staff. Relationships between pupils, parents and staff are very good. There are occasions, however, when pupils are compliant and sit for long periods of time learning very little. These pupils remain unnoticed by teachers and support staff as adults are not looking for signs of inactivity or disengagement from pupils. This slows learning because adults do not recognise when pupils are not working hard enough.

At the time of the inspection that placed the school in special measures in May 2015, it was reported that boys and girls did not mix enough and there were pockets of segregation in the school. This has very much improved and pupils explained to an inspector that teachers now encourage all pupils to work and play together. Pupils explained that the acting headteacher and senior staff introduced what are termed 'cooperative groups' in each class. These involve between four and six boys and girls who encourage other pupils to work together and engage in what pupils and staff call 'cooperative learning'. A group of pupils demonstrated to an inspector how this works and how it has improved the way boys and girls interact in lessons and at other times during the school day. For example, a group of pupils showed the inspector one such 'cooperative learning' activity where pupils circulate around the classroom and meet with the next boy or girl to discuss and describe each other's facial features. During the activity they shake hands or as some put it,

'high five' with the palms of their hands, and then talk to each other before moving around in a clockwise direction to the next available classmate.

Supervision at lunchtime has improved very much since the previous monitoring inspection in December 2015. At that time it was reported that supervisors were not engaging pupils enough or talking to them, and some unsatisfactory behaviour at break times was not being noticed or addressed. This is no longer the case and staff training and changes to the way lunchtime is organised has improved pupils' overall behaviour and attitudes towards non-teaching staff. Pupils have noticed, as explained to an inspector by one pupil, 'It is much fairer now, as we line up for lunch in a different order each day so that the same year group does not always go first.' Another pupil explained, 'When the whistle is blown by the adult or teacher, we all stand still and go to our lines much more safely.' A classmate confirmed this, saying, 'And it is much safer so we don't get hurt because we do not run to our lines any more.'

Pupils were keen to point out to inspectors that they appreciate the fact that, as one put it, 'My teacher tries very hard because she comes to school every day. We know that she does this because she really cares about us.' It was clear from this conversation that pupils felt that, for some pupils in other classes, this was not the case and that some pupils had, as one pupil put it, 'too many different supply teachers and they were not always good enough'. This was confirmed by some of the parents who spoke with inspectors as there was still a general dissatisfaction with the use of temporary supply staff to cover for persistently absent teachers or support staff.

Attendance is improving and is edging closer to the national average. Persistent absence rates are reducing and most pupils are punctual and ready for school. Leaders and staff are doing all they can to deal with a small number of families who are not doing enough to ensure that their children attend school regularly and on time.

Outcomes for pupils

The legacy of low standards and achievement gaps as reported last time still exists, although there has been some improvement to the quality and range of writing in pupils' workbooks. Variable rates of progress between classes and across year groups reflect inconsistencies that still exist in the quality of teaching. Teachers are not expecting enough of the most-able pupils and the continuity of learning for some classes is still being disrupted by absenteeism among some staff.

The achievement gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others vary across classes and year groups. Disadvantaged pupils make relatively better progress in Years 5 and 6 compared with the rest of the school, where the gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and others are less than half a term in writing and mathematics. These gaps are much wider in other years. Assessment information

and pupils' work show that gaps between the achievement of boys and girls are narrowing but there is still some way to go to make sure that the majority of pupils make or exceed the expected rate of progress in relation to their starting points. Pupils make relatively better progress in mathematics compared with reading and writing. Pupils make slower progress in reading than writing because pupils are not reading frequently or widely enough.

There have been improvements where teaching is more consistent and effective. By the end of Year 6, for example, more pupils compared with last year's cohort have reached or exceeded age-related levels in mathematics. In mathematics lessons older pupils are working out more challenging problem-solving tasks but younger pupils, particularly the most able in Years 1 to 4, are not achieving well enough.

Pupils' independent writing, particularly in Years 5 and 6, is improving as pupils are given more opportunities to edit and improve sentences. In too many lessons, however, particularly in Years 1 to 4, pupils copy from printed texts and do not write enough because of the overuse of printed worksheets that are mainly used as time-filling tasks.

External support

External partners commissioned by BEP to support and challenge school leaders and staff are providing effective support. Together with the external partner schools, the IEB has made sure that both the statement of action and school improvement plans are now fit for purpose. The plans include clear milestones and measures of success that help the IEB and senior leaders gauge the impact of their actions on improvements to teaching. The IEB and BEP have also made sure that senior leaders concentrate their efforts on improving monitoring in order to support and challenge teachers and support staff to improve their practice. Consultant headteachers, advisers and leaders from partners such as Robin Hood Academy, the Greet Teaching School Alliance and Arden Primary School undertake regular monitoring reviews which are reported to the IEB. Round table reviews and senior leadership team meetings are much more focused than previously. Improved assessments of pupils' attainment and progress provide more reliable information about achievement gaps and the progress of particular groups and individuals. Sensible and pragmatic decisions were made following the last monitoring inspection, which included better use of the local authority's human resource service and a consultant headteacher to deal with staff absenteeism. This has released senior leaders to focus more on improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Effective partnership work with other schools also provides staff with good opportunities to see and share good practice.