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Mrs Pam Willetts
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Willetts

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Edgar Stammers Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 11 October 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in May 2015. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching to good so that pupils make faster progress, and standards rise, by making sure that teachers:
 - use pupils' progress information to plan work that is at the right level of difficulty to challenge pupils of all abilities
 - adapt teaching and reshape tasks in response to pupils' learning in lessons
 - give pupils more opportunities to practise their reading and writing skills in different subjects
 - provide more opportunities for pupils to use their mathematical skills and knowledge in practical, problem-solving situations
 - teach phonics consistently well throughout Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Improve pupils' behaviour and attendance by making sure that:
 - teachers and teaching assistants manage pupils' behaviour in line with the academy's behaviour policy
 - staff work closely with parents to raise their awareness of the importance of good attendance.
- Strengthen leadership and management by making sure:
 - all policies, particularly those for behaviour, literacy, numeracy and marking, are consistently applied by all staff so that pupils make good progress and behave well
 - training is provided to develop the skills of subject and phase leaders, and time is given for them to fulfil their roles in raising standards and improving the quality of teaching within their areas.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 11 October 2016.

Evidence

The inspector met with the executive headteacher; the two deputy headteachers; the coordinator for special educational needs provision; the chair and two other members of the local governing body; the interim chief executive officer of the Education Central Multi-Academy Trust (ECMAT); and ECMAT's primary schools' adviser. The inspector spoke informally to other staff around the school. The inspector visited classrooms to talk to pupils, observe their learning and to look at the work in their books. The inspector examined a range of documentation, including records of the checks made on the quality of teaching; documents detailing the work of the local governing body and the ECMAT board; and records relating to safeguarding, pupils' attendance and their behaviour. The purpose of the inspection was to determine the progress made by the school in the areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection in May 2015.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit in January 2016, a review of governance has been completed. The name of the governing body has been changed from 'local advisory board' to 'local governing body (LGB)'. A new chair was appointed to the LGB in September. Five teachers and five teaching assistants have left the school. Five new teachers and five teaching assistants have joined. ECMAT is a trust with responsibility for running a chain of 13 local academies, in partnership with the institute of education at the University of Wolverhampton. The chief executive officer of ECMAT left at the end of September. An interim chief executive officer took up the post at the beginning of October.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leaders and managers have not built upon the small improvements noted at the time of the first monitoring visit in January 2016. This is because staff, at every level, have failed to take responsibility for the rate at which the school is improving. For example, teachers do not consistently expect pupils to do their best. Teachers' immediate managers (known in the school as 'phase leaders') do not always hold their staff to account for such weak practice. In turn, senior leaders have not ensured that phase leaders are taking responsibility for pupils' outcomes in their designated area of responsibility. The executive headteacher has not held the senior leaders sufficiently to account for the limited impact of their work. The local governing body has not rigorously challenged the executive headteacher about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment or the rates of pupils' attendance. ECMAT has provided advice to some phase leaders and teachers and has reviewed the school's effectiveness, but has not ensured that governors or senior leaders are driving forward improvement at an acceptable rate. Consequently, improvement is

too slow and the school still provides inadequate education for many of its pupils.

Shortly after the first monitoring visit, an external review of governance concluded that, subject to completion of additional training, members of the body are appropriately skilled to carry out their roles. Governors acted upon the recommendations by attending training on using information about pupils' performance to evaluate the school's effectiveness. Members of the local governing board demonstrate the ability to challenge senior leaders, but have been too accepting of the information they have been given. Minutes of the most recent meeting of the full governing body show the first indication of searching questions for the executive headteacher regarding such information.

The principal reason why the quality of education remains inadequate is that leaders have not rigorously checked that actions to improve the quality of teaching are making a difference to pupils' achievement. Advisers and consultants from ECMAT have provided some support and guidance for teachers, but this has not been managed or monitored strategically. Therefore, while teachers want to improve, they do not always know how to do so or whether their efforts are benefiting pupils.

Phase leaders for each key stage are responsible for overseeing the quality of teachers' work. Some phase leaders are becoming more skilled at giving advice to teachers and in checking up on whether it is making a difference to the quality of their teaching. This is not the picture across the whole school. This difference contributes substantially to the wide variation in the progress that pupils make in different year groups.

Senior leaders have made some visits to lessons and have looked at pupils' books. However, these checks are superficial and do not focus on whether pupils are learning well. Therefore, senior leaders' actions have made little difference to the quality of teaching or to pupils' outcomes. Senior leaders are aware that they need to monitor the quality of teaching much more stringently, giving advice where needed and checking that it is being acted upon. However, little time is available for these leaders to carry out this essential work. The two deputy headteachers are currently teaching the Year 6 class between them, as well as carrying out their additional responsibilities: one for improving attendance, one for improving the quality and use of assessment by teachers to inform planning for pupils' progress. Wider issues around securing consistency in staffing have taken up much of the executive headteacher's time, thus distracting her from improving the work of staff already in the school.

The school's plans for improvement are not as clear and precise as at the time of the previous visit. This shows leaders are not focusing sharply enough on the key priorities for improvement. For example, the current plan does not include actions to improve pupils' attendance, despite rates of absence remaining unacceptably high.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Training provided to the leaders of the early years and key stage 1 has increased their skills and understanding. As a result, teaching in Years 1 and 2 has improved and standards are rising. The early years leader has accurately identified what needs to be done to improve children's achievement by the end of the Reception Year.
- Teachers in Years 1 to 3 believe that their pupils can achieve well. Some teachers are skilled at helping pupils reach these high expectations. As a result, pupils are making better progress in some of these classes. This is particularly so for Year 2 and some Year 3 pupils.
- Teaching assistants are more actively supporting pupils' learning. When this happens, it makes an effective contribution to pupils' progress in lessons.
- Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are putting their growing writing skills to use in other subjects. For example, teachers ask them to use writing to record their thoughts in science or to explain what they have learned in history. This helps pupils improve their skills and to see the point of learning to write.
- The extra time allocated to the coordination of special educational needs provision has raised the profile of pupils who need extra help in the classroom. Some teachers are beginning to gain confidence in how to meet the needs of these pupils.
- The consistent application of the behaviour policy has led to further improvements in the behaviour of most pupils. The number of pupils excluded from the school for poor behaviour has reduced significantly this term.
- Pupils usually behave well in class, particularly when they are taught well. They are well mannered towards adults. For example, many politely tolerate the weaker teaching they receive, rather than choose to behave badly.
- Leaders now hold a wealth of information about pupils' attendance. One of the deputy headteachers keeps close track of whose attendance is unacceptably low. She works hard to challenge and support parents to make sure they bring their children to school regularly. As a result, some pupils' attendance has improved notably.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains highly variable. Consequently, many pupils still make limited progress in some year groups and in some subjects.
- Teachers still do not have a good enough understanding of what pupils can already do and what they need to learn next. This is because teachers do not understand the school's assessment system. Some, when questioned, did not realise that a system even exists.

- The weak assessment of pupils' skills means that teachers cannot accurately pitch the level of work to build on existing knowledge. This leads to work that is too hard for some pupils and too easy for others. To some extent, this happens across the school, but is particularly noticeable in Years 4 to 6.
- Teachers in Years 4 to 6 sometimes make general assumptions about pupils' understanding, based on limited evidence. Consequently, many pupils were observed completing simple, uninspiring tasks that they could already do. For example, one pupil in Year 6 was asked to practise joining two simple sentences together. She explained clearly to the inspector that she already knew how to create complex sentences, using commas to show where she had added extra information. Pupils' books confirm that similar instances happen too often.
- Pupils in Years 4 to 6 are not confident learners. Pupils apply themselves well to the work they are given, but do not push themselves further. This is because their teachers do not help them believe they can achieve well, nor expect that they will. Even when work is too easy, many prefer to comply with the mundane tasks they are given, rather than tell the teacher.
- Teachers' planning in Years 4 to 6 often results in teaching that does not build pupils' knowledge and skills in a systematic way. This means that pupils cannot use their existing knowledge to help them learn something new. This, in turn, leads to gaps in pupils' understanding as they move on to harder work. It also means that pupils sometimes repeat work that they had done in previous years.
- Teachers sometimes fail to address weaknesses in pupils' basic spelling, grammar and punctuation skills. Examples were found of teachers marking pupils' work as correct when the answer was actually wrong. In one pupil's mathematics book, the word 'numbers' was spelled incorrectly many times over many days. The teacher ignored this.
- Exercise books show that in Years 3 to 6, pupils rarely write in lessons other than English. Much of the work in science and topic books shows they spend much time in these lessons completing tasks that have little challenge. Activities such as cutting out pictures and sticking them into their books, or filling in a few words onto a worksheet do not challenge these pupils intellectually and provide little chance for pupils to develop the writing skills they will need when they move on to secondary school.
- While most pupils generally behave well in lessons, a few become bored and distracted when teaching is weak. This sometimes leads to misbehaviour, which distracts them and their classmates from their learning.
- While the attendance of a small number of pupils has improved, rates of absence and late arrival are still very high. Too many pupils miss school frequently. While much has been done, the school has only secured a little improvement in this area.

External support

ECMAT is aware that the school's leaders have not had the capacity to focus on improving the quality of teaching. The need for continuous checking was noted by the trust's adviser in February and highlighted as the greatest barrier to improvement in the review held in June. However, the trust has been too slow to react. The trust has neither provided additional capacity to urgently focus on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, nor has it adequately challenged the executive headteacher over the lack of rigorous monitoring and the slow rate of improvement. While ECMAT has identified a means of providing support from later this term, too much time has been wasted and the school continues to fail its pupils.

Other indications that the rate of improvement is too slow have not been acted upon swiftly enough. For example, an ECMAT visit report from February contains the recommendation for urgent staff training to help teachers understand and use the assessment system before Easter. Lack of staff understanding was again highlighted in an ECMAT review of the school in June. During an adviser visit of 29 September, the executive headteacher's assertion that the system was now 'developed and in use across the school' was accepted at face value and not tested out. Staff are still not using the assessment system to pitch work correctly for their pupils.

ECMAT's future plans are designed to improve support for its academies and to strengthen supervision arrangements. Nevertheless, support given to this school to date has been ineffective in securing an adequate quality of education for its pupils.