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Andrew Moore-Stow
Interim Headteacher
Al-Furqan Primary School
Reddings Lane, Tyseley
Birmingham
B11 3EY

Dear Mr Moore-Stow

Special measures monitoring inspection of Al-Furqan Primary School

Following my visit with Rachel Howie, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 8–9 July 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 fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2012. 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 additional newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection if guidance and support are provided by a senior leader whose quality of teaching is consistently good or better.

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

Usha Devi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2012

- Improve teaching and ensure all pupils in Years 1 to 6 make good progress by ensuring teachers:
 - set work for pupils that is well matched to their abilities
 - have high expectations of how much pupils will learn in a lesson
 - mark books frequently and regularly in order to tell pupils how well they have done and what they need to do to improve
 - set and mark homework on a regular basis.

- Ensure all pupils are taught by teachers, rather than teaching assistants, for the great majority of their lessons in any given subject.

- Provide sufficient material resources, especially books, for pupils to be able to work on their own when required.

- Increase the rate at which the school improves by ensuring leaders and managers at all levels, including governors:
 - set suitably challenging targets for the school's improvement
 - analyse data to gain a full understanding of how pupils are performing, identify weaknesses in their performance and draw up suitable plans to improve
 - monitor teaching more rigorously to provide a clear picture of strengths and weaknesses that can be used to evaluate and manage teachers' performance and identify where further training is required.

- Improve communications with parents and carers so that their concerns can be heard and addressed and their trust in the school's leaders, including governors, can be restored.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 8–9 July 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher, the teachers with responsibilities for English, mathematics and different key stages, the Chair and three other members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), and a group of pupils. Her Majesty's Inspector had a telephone discussion with a representative from the local authority.

During this monitoring inspection, inspectors spent approximately two and a half hours speaking with groups of parents and carers so that they could get a range of views from as many parents and carers as possible. On the first day of the inspection, inspectors invited parents and carers to a meeting in the evening. Inspectors also spoke to parents and carers informally at the start of the second day. In addition to these opportunities, inspectors asked senior leaders to arrange for a group of parents and carers to meet with them. There were insufficient responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) for these to be made available to inspectors.

Context

The school continues to be led by an interim headteacher. He joined the school in February 2014. Last term, the IEB engaged the services of two consultants to support class teachers and those with responsibilities for subjects and year groups. They have continued to work in the school for two days a week. Since the previous monitoring inspection, the IEB has appointed two new teachers. They started at the school in April 2014. The IEB has also appointed two 'cover supervisors' to teach classes during the absence of the permanent class teacher. A Year 2 teacher has been given responsibility for leading on developments in Key Stage 1. The local authority appointed a new Chair of the IEB in May 2014. As reported previously, all pupils are taught by teachers.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils are continuing to make better progress. Evidence from lesson observations and work in their books shows that children in the Reception classes are making at least good progress. In Key Stage 1, pupils are making at least the progress they should. Some are making good progress. In Key Stage 2, rates of progress, although improving, remain uneven. In Year 3, pupils do not always make enough progress because of weaknesses in teaching.

Staff responsible for the progress of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs are working closely with the school's pastoral team to ensure that

these pupils receive carefully targeted support. An increasing proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs are making good progress. Some are making outstanding progress. More-able pupils are capable of making even faster progress, especially in mathematics.

The progress made by the pupils currently in Year 6 has not been enough to help them catch up completely on lost ground. Their achievement has been hampered by weaknesses in teaching and changes in class teachers. The 2014 provisional Year 6 results reflect the impact of this. Standards are expected to be below average. School leaders are reviewing the Year 6 teachers' writing assessments as they underestimate pupils' actual capability. Work in pupils' books paints a more positive picture of the standard of pupils' writing.

The quality of teaching

Most teachers are responding well to the support from the consultants. School records show that teaching continues to strengthen. It is not consistently good in all classes or across different subjects.

Teachers are getting better at planning a range of activities which encourage pupils to use and apply their reading skills in different contexts. Teachers have higher expectations of pupils' writing and are placing a greater emphasis on the correct use of grammar and punctuation. Pupils are spending less time colouring in and more time completing mathematical activities because the use of worksheets has reduced. Although opportunities for pupils to extend their mathematical knowledge by solving more complex problems are increasing, activities for more-able pupils are not always sufficiently challenging.

Inspectors observed a number of strengths in teaching. Where teaching was most effective, activities successfully built on pupils' previous skills and knowledge, teachers asked questions which extended pupils' thinking, teachers used humour well to make the lessons more enjoyable and pupils were encouraged to use a wide range of vocabulary during discussions and in their work. In a Year 6 lesson, for example, the teacher successfully encouraged pupils to use words to bring the objects in their writing 'to life' and to successfully capture the imagination of the reader.

Where teaching was less effective, the activities for pupils, and particularly the more able, were too easy, and pupils were not given access to all the resources and information needed to complete their activity. For instance, in one lesson, pupils were asked to design wind chimes and consider the best way to join the materials they would be using. Pupils told the inspector that it would have been helpful to have seen some actual wind chimes and not just electronic images so they could more closely explore different ways of joining the materials.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, teachers had planned a range of practical activities to develop children's skills, to encourage them to work together and to use their imagination. Examples included a mini-beast café. An inspector was invited to look at the menu and select and pay for a meal before sitting down to eat. The children were particularly keen to recommend the 'salty spider spaghetti'.

Teachers' marking has improved. Teachers are using green and yellow highlighters to acknowledge pupils' achievements and to identify errors. In some classes, teachers are not ensuring that pupils correct their errors. Pupils' handwriting is improving, but is not of a consistently high standard across different subjects.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are continuing to improve. Pupils remain positive about the 'good to be green and great to be gold' system of rewards and consequences. Pupils are particularly keen to collect 'tickets' and 'coins' so that they can select rewards from the 'prize cabinet'.

In lessons, most pupils behave well and listen carefully. They are polite and considerate towards each other and adults. Pupils are becoming increasingly confident at initiating conversations about their work and more resilient when asked to complete more-complex activities. Occasionally, a few pupils lose their focus. This tends to happen when their work is too easy. The increase in rewards and access to a wider range of playground equipment has significantly reduced the number of incidents of unacceptable behaviour in the playground.

The members of the school's pastoral team continue to provide a good level of support for individuals and groups of pupils. Staff are effectively helping pupils who find it difficult to behave well to be more considerate of others. They are also providing helpful support to pupils who lack confidence and who find it difficult to share their ideas in large groups.

Pupils have a better understanding of keeping themselves safe, such as when using computers. The teacher that has taken responsibility for leading on this aspect has organised a range of helpful workshops for parents, pupils and staff. Staff keep a close check on pupils' attendance and rigorously follow up any extended absences from school. Attendance remains in line with the national average for primary schools.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The interim headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher continue to work together well. They have a clear vision for the school and have an accurate view of the school's strengths and the remaining priorities for improvement. They are continuing to take appropriate action to deal with weaknesses in teaching. For

instance, they are ensuring that the two consultants provide individual teachers with tailored support. This is helping to improve teachers' practice.

Senior leaders have continued to provide staff with regular feedback on their work. However, as reported previously, the advice teachers receive from senior leaders does not always make clear the precise actions that they need to take to help different groups of pupils in their class make faster progress.

Class teachers are taking greater responsibility for reviewing information about pupils' achievement and are identifying the specific actions they will take to help pupils in their class make good progress. However, senior leaders are not ensuring teachers in all classes consistently implement the identified actions. In contrast, senior leaders ensure that pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs receive relevant and timely support. This support is enabling disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs to make accelerated progress.

The teacher with responsibility for the Early Years Foundation Stage is working well with other staff to ensure that the youngest children in the school continue to make at least good progress. Her plans for developing the outdoor learning area are appropriate. The newly appointed Key Stage 1 leader is driving forward improvements with tenacity. She has identified where further improvements could be made in pupils' achievement and teaching, and is working with staff to make the required changes. The impact of the teacher with responsibility for Years 5 and 6 has been affected by the changes of teachers. Staffing in these year groups has now stabilised and this is enabling her to work alongside teachers and strengthen teaching. The leaders for English and mathematics remain heavily reliant on the two consultants. They do not have the skills required to independently lead improvements in their areas of responsibility.

Pupils spoke positively about the changes that have been made to the curriculum. They told inspectors that their activities were much more 'interesting' and 'fun'. Pupils have particularly enjoyed working with an artist to create large pieces of artwork for the school corridors. Work in pupils' books shows that opportunities for pupils to learn about faiths other than their own vary across the school. In some classes, pupils have frequent occasions to deepen their understanding of Islam and other world faiths.

The newly appointed Chair of the IEB is providing strong and effective support for senior leaders and staff. She has recently highlighted a number of issues relating to the use of public funds that need resolving as a matter of urgency. Additionally, the Chair of the IEB has raised concerns with the local authority about the overly prescriptive and extensive nature of the 'Conditions of Occupancy' agreed between the previous governing body and Al-Furqan Education Trust. The IEB is particularly concerned that the 'Conditions of Occupancy' unusually make reference to the day to day running of the school.

The members of the IEB are devoting a substantial amount of their time to resolving the issues relating to finance, the school building, and some of the 'Conditions of Occupancy' agreed by the previous governing body. The Chair of the IEB is planning on working with the local authority to resolve these issues. She is also intending on reorganising the roles and responsibilities of individual members to ensure that the IEB can give more time to checking the work of senior leaders and their impact on pupils' achievement. The IEB is planning to review all school policies at the start of next term and to check that all policies, such as those relating to educational visits, are in place and followed rigorously by all staff.

Most parents and carers who spoke to inspectors remain positive about Al-Furqan Primary School. They were particularly positive about the changes introduced by the interim headteacher, the 'Good to be Green' approach, the use of 'tokens' and 'coins' to save up for prizes, and the new reading books. At the time of the last visit, some parents raised concerns about the use of supply teachers. In response to this, the IEB have appointed two 'cover supervisors'. This has reduced the use of external supply staff.

A small number of parents raised a number of issues. These included concerns relating to the progress of more-able pupils, the lack of meetings with parents and carers, and the work of the pastoral team. Inspectors have asked senior leaders to ensure that all teachers plan activities that cater better for more-able pupils. The interim headteacher, the Chair of the IEB and the school's local authority adviser are planning on reintroducing the regular meetings with parents and carers. With regards to the pastoral team, inspection evidence confirms that members of this team are continuing to have a beneficial impact on pupils' emotional and educational development. Despite the actions of the IEB and local authority, some staff continue to experience unfounded criticism from a few parents and carers about their work. It is to the absolute credit of these individual staff that they are not allowing these unfounded criticisms to interfere with their responsibility for keeping pupils safe and ensuring pupils make better progress.

Some parents told inspectors that they are concerned with Al-Furqan Education Trust being too heavily involved in the appointment of a new headteacher. They told inspectors that they have no preference as to which faith group the headteacher comes from; they want an effective headteacher that will help Al-Furqan become a good school.

External support

The two consultants employed by the IEB are helping to strengthen teaching in the school. The interim headteacher has made arrangements for staff to receive further support from a local successful school. This additional support will commence in September 2014.

The IEB, in partnership with the local authority is continuing to provide senior leaders and staff with effective support by tackling a range of issues. The IEB is

particularly appreciative of the support provided by the local authority financial services.

It is imperative, that the issues that that have come to light during this monitoring inspection are resolved promptly so that IEB members can spend more of their time focusing on pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. Inspectors strongly recommend that the local authority:

- ensures the appointment of the permanent headteacher is a rigorous process
- resolves issues relating to the use of school funds and the IEBs concerns about the 'Conditions of Occupancy'
- continues to protect the welfare of individual staff at Al-Furqan Primary School.