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Andrew Moore-Stow
Interim Headteacher
Al-Furqan Primary School
Reddings Lane
Tyseley
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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 12–13 March 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 fourth 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 newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection if guidance and support is provided by a senior leader whose quality of teaching is consistently good or better. HMI also recommended that the newly qualified teachers receive additional support from staff in local successful schools.

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 12-13 March 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 and different key stages, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority.

During this monitoring inspection, HMI 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, HMI invited parents and carers to a meeting in the evening. HMI also spoke to parents and carers informally at the start of the second day. In addition to these opportunities, HMI asked senior leaders to arrange for a group of parents and carers to meet with them. HMI also took account of correspondence from parents and carers. There were insufficient responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) for these to be made available to inspectors.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection there have been substantial changes in staffing. The previous interim headteacher, who started at the school in October 2013, left in December 2013. In January 2014, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteachers with support from the school's local authority adviser took responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school. Another interim headteacher joined the school in February 2014. An assistant headteacher, who started at the school in September 2013, left in February 2014 to take on a new headship. Four class teachers have left since the previous monitoring inspection. Two of these were temporary teachers. The IEB appointed two new permanent teachers and two new temporary teachers. In February 2014, the IEB engaged the services of two consultants to support class teachers and those with responsibilities for subjects and year groups. They work in the school for two days a week. As reported previously, all pupils are taught by teachers.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Inspection evidence confirms that children in the Early Years Foundation Stage continue to make good progress. Some children are making outstanding progress because of consistently strong teaching. In Key Stage 1 pupils continue to make at least expected progress. An increasing proportion of pupils in this key stage are making good progress.

In Key Stage 2, progress is improving but remains variable. Pupils make expected and sometimes good progress. However, they occasionally make inadequate progress. This variation is a result of inconsistencies in teaching. In response to this variability in progress, senior leaders intend to make changes to the organisation of staffing so that pupils in Key Stage 2 who have not made sufficient gains in their learning receive additional support.

The progress of pupils who are disabled and have special educational needs, and the more able, is similar to their peers. As with other pupils in the school, the progress they make is determined by the teaching they experience.

The standards reached by younger pupils in reading, writing and mathematics are rising quickly and are closer to those expected. Standards remain below those expected for older pupils. The recent improvements in teaching are having a beneficial impact on pupils' learning as observed during this monitoring inspection. However, the impact of this on standards in Key Stage 2 has yet to be seen.

The quality of teaching

Teaching continues to improve as confirmed by senior leaders' checks on the quality of teaching, pupils' work and lessons observed during this monitoring inspection. In order to ensure teaching is consistently good and better, particularly in Key Stage 2, senior leaders have organised further training and support for staff.

There are some common strengths in teaching. Since the previous monitoring inspection, the teaching of writing has improved noticeably. Teachers are ensuring pupils have regular opportunities to write across different subjects and they are placing a stronger emphasis on the correct use of grammar and punctuation. They are also using a range of resources to encourage pupils to write. In Year 6 for instance, pupils were asked to write a diary entry. The teacher used a film clip of *'The diary of a wimpy kid'*, to motivate pupils successfully before they started writing.

Teachers and support staff are continuing to encourage pupils to use their knowledge of the sounds that letters make (phonics). This is helping pupils to read words confidently that they find difficult. Pupils' attitudes towards reading are improving because staff have purchased books that pupils find enjoyable. Pupils have individual 'reading records' so that they can keep a note of the books they have read both at home and school. However, some teachers do not make effective use of these reading records. For instance, they do not regularly check them, comment on how well individual pupils are reading or encourage pupils to read regularly at home.

Teachers are increasingly providing pupils with the opportunity to use their mathematical knowledge to solve problems. They are also making sure that pupils

learn about different aspects of mathematics, such as time and shape. However, pupils' work shows that pupils are not always moved on to new learning quickly enough. Occasionally, pupils spend too long colouring in worksheets instead of focusing on the mathematical part of the activity. This slows down the progress they make.

In Key Stages 1 and 2, where teaching was most effective, activities were well planned for pupils of different abilities. Pupils were provided with a good range of resources to use while they worked. Teachers had high expectations of the amount of work pupils were expected to complete by the end of the lesson and used praise well to keep pupils motivated. Teachers and support staff also asked probing questions to extend pupils' thinking. In one successful example, pupils in a Year 1 class were creating a story plan based on the book, *'We're going on a bear hunt'*. Staff used questions well to encourage pupils to think carefully about the animal they were going to find and what they would see during their 'hunt'. One pupil explained excitedly, 'In my story, there will be a leopard hiding in the dark cave!' Where teaching was less effective, activities were not suitable for pupils of different abilities. They were either too easy or too difficult.

Teaching continues to improve in the Early Years Foundation Stage. In the Reception classes, activities were well planned so that they effectively built on what children of different abilities could already do. They also encouraged children to use their imagination. The Reception outdoor area is underdeveloped. The teacher with responsibility for the Early Years Foundation Stage has suitable plans in place for developing this.

The interim headteacher has introduced a new approach to marking pupils' work so that pupils' achievements and errors are clearly identified. However this is a recent development and its use remains variable. At its best, pupils are provided with precise guidance and given time to correct their errors. Support staff are working with groups of pupils to help them improve their letter formation. As a consequence, pupils' handwriting is steadily improving.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour continues to improve. The interim headteacher has introduced a new system of rewards and consequences, 'good to be green and great to be gold'. One pupil, when speaking with HMI commented, 'it is fantastic!'. Pupils are responding well to the new system as confirmed by the reduction of incidents of poor behaviour. Many parents that spoke to HMI were particularly positive about the work of the pastoral team. They appreciate the level of support provided to help individual pupils behave appropriately. Inspection evidence confirms that senior leaders and members of the pastoral team take appropriate action in response to incidents of unacceptable behaviour.

In lessons, most pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. They are polite and listen to each other carefully. However, when activities do not engage pupils they become restless. Around school, pupils do not always walk as quietly as they could. The reorganisation of playtimes has given pupils more space to play games and use playground equipment. This has reduced the number of accidents. Nevertheless, pupils told HMI that although behaviour in the playground has improved, some pupils get a little too excited while playing and bump into each other.

Pupils who spoke with HMI confirmed that they feel safe. Pupils have a good understanding of road safety. In contrast, their understanding of e-safety is less secure. Attendance remains in line with the national average for primary schools.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

During January 2014, the deputy headteacher and assistant headteachers, with support from the local authority adviser effectively managed the transition between one interim headteacher and the next. They successfully maintained and built on the changes introduced by the interim headteacher that left in December 2013.

The newly appointed interim headteacher, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher have very quickly formed a strong cohesive team. Their plans for improving teaching and helping pupils make even faster progress are suitable and based on an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have high expectations of staff and are taking robust action to tackle weaknesses in teaching. This has led to some changes in staffing. As a consequence, teaching although inconsistent, is stronger than at the time of the previous monitoring inspection.

The school's systems for checking the work of staff continue to strengthen. Senior leaders and consultants are providing staff with generally helpful advice in order to help them improve their practice. However, the advice that teachers receive does not always focus enough on the actions teachers need to take to help specific groups of pupils, such as the more-able, to make consistently faster progress.

The interim headteacher has introduced a new system for recording information about pupils' achievement. This is enabling senior leaders to identify the pupils that could make faster progress and to take appropriate action. The assistant headteacher, for instance, is regularly reviewing information related to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs in order to ensure these pupils have access to the right levels of support.

The teacher with responsibility for the Early Years Foundation Stage is having a positive impact on teaching and children's learning. Since the previous monitoring inspection she has worked well with teachers and support staff to ensure learning

activities are suitable for children. She has also helped staff make sure that they use questions to carefully check children's understanding and to challenge children's thinking. This is resulting in good and better progress for the youngest children in the school.

Other teachers with responsibilities for subjects or year groups are gradually developing the skills required to help improve the school. They are beginning to check the work of staff with support from senior leaders. They are also starting to make sure all staff consistently implement agreed actions, such as those relating to the setting of homework and the marking of pupils' work. Nevertheless, once issues are identified not all of the teachers with responsibilities check quickly or often enough that any agreed actions are consistently implemented by staff. This is resulting in inconsistencies between classes.

Senior leaders have made appropriate changes to the school curriculum. Pupils told HMI that teachers are getting better at making lessons more interesting, and described some as 'exciting'. For instance in Year 4, teachers used the book, *'George's marvellous medicine'* to plan a range of activities linked to the theme of 'potions'. Pupils have used their imagination to 'create' potions and their mathematical skills to work out and measure the ingredients needed. The pupils were keen to show HMI their 'potion tent', which contained a wide range of ingredients and measuring equipment. Opportunities for pupils to participate in physical education activities have markedly strengthened. The specialist coaches employed by the school offer pupils the chance to take part in a good range of activities both during the school day and after school.

Members of the IEB continue to provide senior leaders with effective support. They have established a 'standards and improvement group'. Members of this group are checking carefully the actions of senior leaders and the difference these actions are making to pupils' learning and the quality of teaching.

Most parents and carers who met with HMI remain positive about the improvements taking place in the school. They told HMI that senior leaders are ensuring pupils with specific learning needs receive the right support. Parents were complimentary about the new reading books, homework activities, the work of the pastoral team and the work of the physical education coaches. They also said that they appreciate the time the interim headteacher and staff make available to listen to and respond to any concerns they may have. Some parents and carers spoke enthusiastically about the opportunity they were given to organise a successful fund-raising event.

Issues that continue to concern some parents include the changes in staffing, additional support for pupils in Years 2 and 6 and the limited amount of information about the improvements being made. HMI discussed the concerns raised by parents and carers with senior leaders. The interim headteacher, in partnership with the IEB, has appointed new teachers and is in the process of recruiting and appointing some

more permanent staff. Pupils in Years 2 and 6 are receiving some additional support and further support is planned. For instance, the interim headteacher has organised for a specialist maths teacher to provide Year 6 pupils with help. The interim headteacher acknowledges that parents could be kept better informed about the improvements being made. He is planning on sharing this information in the regular newsletter.

External support

The work of the consultants employed by the IEB has been well received by staff. Local schools have continued to provide suitable training tailored to the needs of individual teachers. This work is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching.

Following the previous monitoring inspection, HMI raised concerns relating to the welfare of individual staff and the unjustified criticism they were receiving from a few parents and carers. In response to this, the IEB, with support from the local authority has introduced robust procedures for responding to individual parents and carers.

The local authority acted swiftly to secure the services of an interim headteacher, when the previous interim headteacher left in December 2013. Since February 2013, the school has been led by three interim headteachers. The handover from one interim headteacher to the next has been well managed by the school's local authority adviser, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteachers. Consequently, each interim headteacher has successfully built on the work of the previous one. Nevertheless, the uncertainty regarding the longer term plans for the leadership of the school is unhelpful. HMI strongly recommends that the local authority and the IEB work together to secure stability at leadership level.