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Arshad Mohammad
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Dear Mr Mohammad

Special measures monitoring inspection of Al-Hijrah School

Following my visit with Cathy Draper, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 18 to 19 September 2018, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the full inspection that took place in March 2017. 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.

We noted that the school continues to operate an unlawful discriminatory policy of strict segregation by sex in the secondary phase. Plans for the school's future and current practice take some account of the need to address this practice.

However, 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 special measures.

However, despite this and the segregation by sex in the secondary phase, the school may appoint three newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection. You can appoint these newly qualified teachers to the English, mathematics or science departments. You should contact me should you wish to appoint a newly qualified teacher to a department different to those listed.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board (IEB), the

regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2017.

- As a matter of urgency, improve safeguarding so that pupils are safe in all key stages, including in the early years, by:
 - clarifying the procedures for supporting pupils with medical needs and for dealing with emergencies and ensuring that all staff in all parts of the school, including lunchtime supervisors, are completely clear about all aspects of these procedures
 - ensuring that paediatric first-aid training for staff in the early years is kept up to date and checked regularly
 - completing the necessary checks on all staff and ensuring that the single central record is compliant
 - ensuring that the number of staff on duty outside at breaktimes and lunchtimes is sufficient for the age and number of pupils, takes place as planned, and that staff on duty actively supervise the pupils
 - making sure that all staff, particularly the lunchtime supervisors, fully understand the safeguarding training they have received and put this into practice
 - looking into pupils' current concerns about bullying and ensuring that bullying concerns are always taken seriously, recorded and acted upon
 - reviewing the use of the outside areas used at breaktimes and lunchtimes so that all pupils' needs and interests are catered for, especially in the playground where boys play football.
- Improve behaviour and the management of behaviour by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders and governors gain an accurate picture of behaviour in the school, both in lessons and at informal times, taking into account the views of staff and pupils, and that leaders then take action accordingly
 - making sure that, in lessons and around the school, expectations of behaviour are high and consistently upheld
 - ensuring that pupils learn to respect adults in the school, their peers and the school environment
 - working with pupils to improve their ability to manage their own behaviour better at informal and social times, including providing them with more activities to do at these times
 - improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- Ensure that teaching is consistently good, including in the early years, by:
 - making sure that pupils have the necessary skills to apply their English and mathematical understanding and knowledge in a range of contexts
 - making sure that teachers use the ongoing assessment of pupils' understanding and not just test results to plan and teach lessons
 - picking up on and addressing pupils' errors and misconceptions more quickly
 - making sure that the assessment of children's progress in the early years is accurate.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that leaders gain an accurate picture of the quality of teaching across the school, identify where it is weak, and support and challenge staff accordingly
 - supporting teachers to eliminate both serious and low-level disruption in lessons
 - making sure that governors receive full and accurate information about the school's work so that they can support and challenge effectively
 - providing leaders at all levels with the support they need to strengthen their knowledge and understanding of the areas for which they are responsible and to enable them to become effective, including by forging links with other schools.

An external review of governance, including the school's use of the special educational needs and/or disabilities funding, should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 18 September 2018 to 19 September 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, including pupils' learning and behaviour in the primary and secondary phases and at breaktimes and lunchtime. Inspectors spoke to pupils informally and formally about their learning and how they learn to stay safe and play a positive role in British society. The work in pupils' books was evaluated. A range of school documents and information were scrutinised, including the policies and procedures for keeping pupils safe, the checks made on staff's suitability to work with children and young people and information about pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. Inspectors met with you, school leaders, staff and members of the IEB, including the chair of the IEB. Inspectors also met with representatives of Birmingham City Council. There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for these to be considered.

As well as evaluating the effectiveness of the school's actions in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the March 2017 inspection, inspectors evaluated the school's short-, mid- and long-term plans for complying with the Court of Appeal's judgment in relation to sex segregation in mixed schools.

Context

Boys and girls are taught together in all classes in the primary phase. Primary pupils can mix during breaktimes, lunchtime, in assemblies and on school visits. This includes Year 6, which is a change since the previous inspection in May 2018.

The school operates a policy of segregation by sex in the secondary phase. Boys and girls are taught separately for all secondary classes. Secondary boys and girls are not allowed to mix at breaktimes, lunchtimes or during lesson changeovers. In addition, pupils are not allowed to enter certain rooms or use facilities when they are being used by the opposite sex. The policy causes a detriment to all pupils as they are denied the choice to socialise with the opposite sex, and the educational benefits of doing so, including preparing them for life in modern Britain. Given this detriment, the policy constitutes direct discrimination contrary to the Equality Act 2010.

In 2017, the Court of Appeal affirmed that segregation by sex in schools, in analogous circumstances, is contrary to the Equality Act 2010. In the monitoring reports dated 5 April 2018 (following a visit on 27 to 28 February 2018) and 8 June 2018 (following a visit on 23 to 24 May 2018), it was noted that a further section 8 inspection would be arranged to take place after 1 September 2018 and that, from this date, any ongoing unlawful segregation by sex would be taken into account when determining the inspection judgements. The school's policy of segregation has therefore been considered in this inspection when determining the judgements.

The Department for Education's non-statutory guidance on this issue entitled 'Gender separation in mixed schools', published in June 2018, states at paragraph 2: 'In a mixed school, any separation of pupils of either sex that denies them the choice or opportunity to interact socially, or to interact in an educational setting, with pupils of the other sex is likely to involve subjecting the pupils to a detriment because of their sex. This will be direct discrimination and will be unlawful unless it falls within one of the statutory exceptions contained within the Equality Act, even if done for religious or other bona fide reasons and even if the quality of the education provided to boys and girls is the same.'

You were unable to provide any evidence that segregation by sex in the school's secondary phase falls into the statutory exceptions.

Since the previous monitoring inspection in May 2018, a cover supervisor and two learning mentors have left the school. There are six long-term supply teachers in English, mathematics, art, food technology and design technology.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The local authority and the IEB continue to work with a potential sponsor for the school's conversion to academy status. However, progress has been slow. The local authority and IEB suggest that the long-term plan to open a mixed sex primary school and to admit secondary-aged pupils to separate single-sex or other schools by September 2019 will resolve the issue of unlawful segregation by sex in a mixed setting. The formal consultation with staff and parents about these plans begins shortly. However, school leaders and Birmingham City Council have not sufficiently identified, considered or addressed the actual or potential detriment to pupils because of segregation. In addition, the plans to increase the opportunities for boys and girls to mix are limited. While some activities and trips for secondary pupils are now mixed, these opportunities are limited and not open to all boys and girls. The views of pupils are mixed. Some pupils are content with the current arrangements. However, some pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they would like the opportunity to share experiences with the opposite sex, particularly in lessons where they do not have the opportunity to consider the views, beliefs and thoughts of others. As a result, some pupils have a very narrow view of the opposite sex. In addition, a minority of pupils are concerned that they are not being fully prepared for the next stage of their education or employment and training, as they are not used to working in a mixed setting. All classes and activities in the primary phase are now mixed.

Leaders' actions to address most of the areas for improvement identified at the inspection in March 2017 are appropriate and result in improved safeguarding arrangements and improvements in pupils' behaviour and outcomes. The continued reduction in the incidents of poor behaviour and in the number of internal exclusions and fixed-term exclusions are examples of these improvements. In addition, pupils' unvalidated provisional outcomes at the end of key stages 1, 2 and

4 in 2018 are positive across a range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science. However, inconsistencies remain in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in Years 7 and 8. The poor attendance of a minority of pupils across the school continues.

The school's designated safeguarding leads demonstrate a secure understanding of the Department for Education's updated September 2018 'Keeping children safe in education' document. All staff completed training at the start of term. The designated safeguarding leads have successfully instilled a culture of 'safeguarding is everyone's responsibility' and staff understand their role and responsibilities within this culture. Staff demonstrate an understanding of the school's policies and procedures and of what to do should they have concerns about a pupil's safety and welfare. For example, staff now identify potential risks to pupils' safety and share this information so that leaders can consider next steps. The checks on staff's suitability to work with pupils are thorough and appropriately recorded on the school's single central record. All members of the senior leadership team and an administrative member of staff have completed safer recruitment training. All first-aid training, including paediatric first-aid training, is up to date. Pupils continue to say they feel safe and that staff actively supervise breaktimes and lunchtimes. Staff provide playground equipment, for example skipping ropes, for the pupils at breaktimes. The pupils say that they greatly enjoy playing with this equipment and that pupils' behaviour has improved as a result.

Since the previous inspection in May 2018, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has been employed to work full time. The second part of the special educational needs funding review has been completed. A suitable accessibility plan is now in place. The SENCo, assistant headteacher and higher-level teaching assistant have begun to develop a culture where the teaching and support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is the responsibility of all staff. Staff have willingly engaged in the training that has been provided. As a result, the majority of staff have a better understanding of how to identify and support pupils' needs. However, the SEN and/or disabilities team rightly recognise that staff need further training on specific needs such as identifying and supporting pupils who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The school works in collaboration with a wide range of outside agencies and health professionals to provide appropriate and timely support to meet pupils' needs.

An increasing number of leaders are evaluating and reviewing the information and data they have, to inform subsequent actions and development plans. As a result, these leaders know the children's needs and ambitions in detail. However, a few leaders are not confidently analysing what they know about pupils' learning, behaviour and attendance in order to intervene quickly when issues arise. This aspect of their work remains an area for development.

The IEB continues to provide appropriate challenge and support to school leaders. They question leaders about the information they provide and hold them

accountable for pupils' progress. The IEB supports the school's appraisal process and has a secure understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The improvements in pupils' outcomes and behaviour are signs that this work has been effective. The IEB has worked diligently with parents' groups and the local authority to consult on and prepare for the proposed changes to the school's organisation or potential closure. Parents have valued being involved in these ongoing discussions.

Leaders and staff have benefited from working with other schools. Staff speak positively about the training and support they receive. The majority of teachers are applying this training confidently to their everyday practice and an increasing number of leaders are carrying out their roles and responsibilities effectively. However, a few staff are still in the early stages of successfully implementing what they have learned.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

While the quality of education is improving, pupils do not experience consistently effective teaching. The work in pupils' books shows that where they receive teaching that supports their learning they make sound progress from their starting points. This is because teachers use their assessment of pupils' learning to build on what pupils already know and can do. They ensure that they suitably challenge pupils to deepen their understanding during lessons and across a series of lessons. Additionally, these staff provide further support and extra work for pupils who need to consolidate or develop their learning. The improvements in pupils' provisional outcomes at the end of key stages 1, 2 and 4 show that a larger proportion of teachers are becoming increasingly more effective.

However, in a minority of classes, pupils repeat work that is too easy or does not progressively build on their prior knowledge. For example, in a few mathematics classes, particularly in Years 7 and 8, pupils jump from one topic to another without developing a deep understanding of a specific concept. In addition, where teaching is less effective, teachers do not give careful enough consideration to what they want pupils to learn. As a result, some learning activities do not support pupils' learning effectively.

Pupils in the primary and secondary phase are becoming more confident in applying their literacy skills across a range of subjects. As a result, pupils' writing for different purposes and audiences is improving. Pupils' ability to apply their mathematical understanding is less well developed.

Children who started in Reception Year this term have settled well. Staff have a clear understanding of children's needs and have quickly established effective routines. As a result, the majority of children are confident in the classroom and in the outdoor area. Staff support the children who are less confident and upset when parents leave them in the morning effectively. Teachers and support staff use what

they know about the children to broadly plan and deliver appropriate learning activities. The need to develop children's imaginative play and thinking skills, for example through effective questioning and developing children's resilience and independence, remains an area for improvement.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The continued segregation of pupils in the secondary phase causes a detriment to the development of all pupils' personal development and welfare. For example, they are denied the choice to socialise with the opposite sex, and the education benefits of doing so, including preparing them for life in modern Britain. For example, a few pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they worried about being 'socially awkward' in the next stage of their education or employment and training as they have been denied the opportunity to mix with the opposite sex. In addition, some pupils said that they would like to hear the views and opinions of the opposite sex during debates and discussions in lessons but were denied this opportunity.

The improvements in pupils' behaviour have been sustained. This is shown through fewer incidents of poor behaviour, internal exclusions and fixed-term exclusions. The atmosphere in lessons and around the school is conducive to learning. This is a huge improvement since the full inspection in March 2017. However, pupils still become demotivated and lose interest in their work when the teaching fails to interest or engage them. This is particularly the case when they have to complete work that they have done before or that is too easy.

Pupils' attendance has declined. This is particularly the case for specific classes. Leaders and staff are aware of the issue and are taking reasonable steps to challenge those pupils with particularly low attendance and to work with their families. However, the absence figures remain high.

Outcomes for pupils

The provisional unvalidated outcomes for pupils at the end of key stages 1, 2 and 4 show improvement across most subjects. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception Year has increased. The proportion of pupils achieving the pass mark in the phonics screening check has also increased and has improved year on year.

At the end of key stage 1, the provisional outcomes show that a higher proportion of pupils have achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the proportion of pupils working at greater depth in these subjects has declined slightly since 2017.

At the end of key stage 2, a higher proportion than in 2017 were working at the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils have made secure progress from their starting points across these subjects.

Pupils have made good progress across a range of subjects at the end of key stage 4. Pupils have done particularly well in English, mathematics and science. For example, the provisional results in mathematics show that, on average, pupils have achieved a whole grade higher in 2018 than they did in 2017.

Across the school, girls consistently do better than boys. The difference in academic outcomes between pupils who are disadvantaged and those who are not is being diminished. The outcomes for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are variable. In general, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities who have poor attendance, which is sometimes because of medical issues, do not do as well as their classmates.

External support

Leaders and staff continue to receive effective support from Parkfield Community School, Whitehouse Common Primary School, Christ Church C of E Primary School, Colmore Partnership Teaching School Alliance and Little Sutton Primary School. Staff told inspectors that they have greatly enjoyed this training and support and found it beneficial. The improvements in the quality of teaching, leadership and management and pupils' outcomes, particularly for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities or who are disadvantaged, show that this support is effective.

Priorities for further improvement

Leaders should make sure that they end the school's unlawfully discriminatory practice of segregation by sex for pupils in the secondary phase as soon as possible.