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Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
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Sir Michael Wilshaw
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector

Dear Secretary of State

Advice note from Sir Michael Wilshaw, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, to the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP, on the first monitoring visits to academies and maintained schools subject to special measures in Birmingham.

Background

Her Majesty's Inspectors carried out unannounced special measures monitoring inspections of five schools in Birmingham between 8 September and 12 September 2014. All of the schools that were inspected are publicly funded: four are academies and one is a local authority maintained school.¹

All of the schools were inspected under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. These inspections were the first monitoring inspections following the judgements in March and April 2014 that all five schools required special measures.²

This advice note draws on evidence from the five unannounced inspections and meetings that were held with lead inspectors, representatives from Birmingham City Council and representatives from the Department for Education.

¹ Inspection outcomes are included at Annex 1.

² *Monitoring inspections of schools that are subject to special measures (from September 2012) (120221)*, September 2014; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/monitoring-inspections-of-schools-are-subject-special-measures-january-2013.

Summary of inspection findings

1. Changes to governance and leadership in all five schools have been slow:

- The time taken to appoint new trustees and senior leaders means that very little action has been taken to address the serious concerns raised in the previous inspections.
- In Saltley School and Specialist Science College, an interim executive board (IEB) was formally agreed on 1 July 2014. In Park View Educational Trust (PVET), the new trustees were put in place on 15 July 2014. In Oldknow Primary School, the new trustees took over on 3 August 2014.
- Her Majesty's Inspectors found that the new trustees and IEB members have appropriate backgrounds and skills for their roles. However, they have had very little time to secure suitable leadership for the schools or to take effective action on the weaknesses raised in the previous inspections. New headteachers are in place in three of the five schools. At the time of the inspections, they had only been in post for a few days.
- Her Majesty's Inspectors found that too much poor practice remained unchallenged during the summer term. For example, in Park View Academy, little had been done to discourage segregation and to encourage boys and girls to sit together in lessons and share opinions and ideas. In Golden Hillock School, senior leaders reported that, during the summer term, they were not supported by the outgoing trustees in addressing their concerns about safeguarding.
- The statements of action³ and improvement plans presented by the five schools are not fit for purpose. Her Majesty's Inspectors found that the plans are not sufficiently specific to allow progress against the key actions to be thoroughly assessed and some plans do not identify who is responsible for key areas of improvement. Several of the plans have undergone considerable revision since they were originally written, requiring school leaders to change their focus and direction, further slowing progress.
- In PVET, trustees have a robust process to appoint future parent governors, but this is not the case in Oldknow Academy or Saltley School.

³ *Monitoring inspections of schools that are subject to special measures (from September 2012)* (120221), September 2014; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/monitoring-inspections-of-schools-are-subject-special-measures-january-2013.

2. Many staff remain concerned about leadership:

- In all five schools, some staff who spoke to Her Majesty's Inspectors or completed the staff questionnaire expressed some optimism about change. There was greater confidence that they could speak out and would be listened to.
- However, staff also raised concerns about equality and fairness. For example, some staff commented that processes and procedures are not open and fair for all and that some staff hold roles for which they are not qualified or experienced.
- In Saltley School, a few staff commented that some staff segregate themselves into groups based on their religious beliefs and that this had not yet been addressed by school leaders.

3. There has been very little change to the existing unbalanced curriculum in the inspected schools:

- Plans for the required curriculum changes have been drawn up but often lack the detail required to ensure that effective action will be taken to 'actively promote' fundamental British values and tolerance of those of different faiths and beliefs. In Golden Hillock School, religious education GCSE students have to teach themselves for options other than Islam. As a result, these students are at a significant disadvantage.

4. The local authority is not yet effectively sharing information with Ofsted about the action it is taking:

- Despite repeated requests, Ofsted has yet to see the single integrated plan that the local authority has drawn up in response to the Clarke,⁴ Kershaw⁵ and Ofsted⁶ reports.

⁴ *Report into allegations concerning Birmingham schools arising from the 'Trojan Horse' letter*, Peter Clarke, Education Commissioner, July 2014; www.gov.uk/government/publications/birmingham-schools-education-commissioners-report.

⁵ *Trojan Horse Review Group: Report to Leader of Birmingham City Council*, Ian Kershaw; www.birmingham.gov.uk/trojanhorsereview.

⁶ *Advice note provided on academies and maintained schools in Birmingham to the Secretary of State for Education*, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, as commissioned by letter dated 27 March 2014, Ofsted, June 2014; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/advice-note-provided-academies-and-maintained-schools-birmingham-secretary-of-state-for-education-rt.

- Ofsted is aware that the local authority has begun to audit the range of safeguarding provision and training across all five schools. This audit is incomplete and it is currently unclear as to whether staff in the identified schools have undertaken specific training to keep children safe. Inspection evidence demonstrates that some of the schools had undertaken initial safeguarding training with staff.
- The local authority has put in place, where relevant, more rigorous screening procedures for new local authority governors. The expectations and commitment required of governors have been clarified. Potential governors have to complete an application form and provide references and all applications are scrutinised by a Nomination Committee. However, similar processes are not in place to check the suitability of existing governors.

Recommendations

In addition to the recommendations made in my advice note provided on academies and maintained schools in Birmingham to your predecessor on 9 June 2014, the Department for Education should:

- consider how it can take more rapid action to require a change of trustees and governors in academies when serious concerns are identified
- review responsibilities for drawing up timely and effective statements of action and improvement plans in academies when current governance is deemed to be inadequate
- ensure that local authorities and the Department for Education consistently carry out their statutory responsibilities for safeguarding children in schools
- ensure that the local authority promptly shares its single integrated plan with Ofsted.

This advice note is made in accordance with Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's discretion as established in section 118 (3) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 regarding the provision of advice to the Secretary of State.

Annex 1

Table of schools and inspection judgements

School Name	Date of monitoring inspection	Inspection outcome
Golden Hillock School - A Park View Academy	10 September 2014	The sponsor's statement of action is not fit for purpose. The academy's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.
Nansen Primary School - A Park View Academy	12 September 2014	The sponsor's statement of action is not fit for purpose. The academy's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.
Oldknow Academy	9 September 2014	The sponsor's statement of action is not fit for purpose. The academy's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.
Park View School - the Academy of Mathematics and Science	8 September 2014	The sponsor's statement of action is not fit for purpose. The academy's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.
Saltley School and Specialist Science College	11 September 2014	The combined local authority's statement of action and current school improvement plan are not fit for purpose