

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancs Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566 852
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email: chuxley@cfbt.com



27 September 2012

Mrs K Allen
Principal
E-ACT Blackley Academy
Victoria Avenue
Manchester
M9 0RD

Dear Mrs Allen

No formal designation monitoring inspection of E-ACT Blackley Academy

Following my visit with Marguerite Murphy, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 25–26 September 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the academy's predecessor school was judged to be a school causing concern.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, Assistant Principals, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the academy sponsor.

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

The academy is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all pupils.

Context

Blackley Academy is larger than most primary schools. The proportion of pupils known to be supported through pupil premium is higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is lower than the national average, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

The proportion of pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average. Since converting to an academy a new Principal is leading the school and a new leadership team is in place, some of whom were previous members of staff. Six teachers and three teaching assistants have left and six new teaching appointments have been made.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Lessons observed by inspectors and evidence provided from looking at pupils' work show the proportion of pupils making expected levels of progress in reading, writing and mathematics is steadily improving. Where teachers engage pupils in their learning and meet their needs well, pupils make at least expected progress and in some cases better than this. As a result, pupils are beginning to catch up with their learning so that previous underperformance is being tackled.

Across the academy there is a clear focus on improving outcomes and staff are committed to improving pupils' communication, reading, writing and mathematical skills. Children join the Nursery class with skills and experiences that are well below those for their age, particularly in communication and language, and literacy. The learning experiences in the Early Years Foundation Stage are beginning to better meet the needs of children. Key workers know their children well and they provide experiences which support their development. Unvalidated results for Key Stage 1 show attainment remains below national averages with significant weaknesses in writing.

By the time pupils leave the academy attainment is now just in line with national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils supported by the pupil premium are making better progress and, as a result, the school is beginning to close the progress gap for groups of learners. Pupils with a disability and those with special educational needs make similar progress to their peers. This is because the academy is beginning to provide more targeted work for pupils who require extra support.

Unvalidated results for Key Stage 2 in 2012 show that challenging targets were met.

The quality of teaching

Improving teaching is the main priority for the academy and there is an emphasis on promoting and developing high-quality teaching. Although teachers are committed to improving their practice there remains some variability in the quality of teaching across the academy. While some teaching is outstanding, in a minority of lessons teaching was not strong enough to enable all pupils to make progress. In those lessons teachers did not tailor activities to the learning needs of all pupils.

In the best lessons, pupils are enthusiastic and show good attitudes to learning. They acquire new skills and understanding and enjoy the challenging activities set by teachers. There is an emphasis on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills

and pupils work collaboratively. Teaching assistants provide effective support and guide pupils so they make good progress. Positive relationships and confidence building result in pupils who are willing 'to have a go' and they are praised for their efforts.

A new curriculum is beginning to make a positive difference to pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development; for example, pupils enjoy their involvement in a steel band and the woodwind and brass orchestra.

Teachers are becoming more confident at making assessments on what pupils can and cannot do and pupils know their levels of achievement and what they need to do to improve.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Most pupils are polite and friendly and get along with each other. They express the view that there have been improvements in behaviour at the academy. Although poor behaviour is uncommon, pupils do recognise that low-level disruption in lessons can interrupt their learning on occasions. For example, one pupil's comment was that, 'When I'm trying to think, if people are talking about other things I find it harder.' Inspectors noted some variability in behaviour and attitudes to learning, ranging from exemplary to poor. This is usually directly related to the quality of teaching in lessons. Where teaching is good or better, even potentially challenging behaviour is managed well because all groups of pupils are kept fully engaged in their work. The academy's behaviour policy and expectations are made clear and usually consistently applied by staff.

Pupils understand what kinds of behaviour are unacceptable and know about the different forms that bullying can take. They say there have been far fewer instances of physical bullying, and that name-calling, for example of a homophobic or racist nature, would be reported and dealt with. Pupils show a good awareness of e-safety.

Small but steady improvements have been made to attendance and punctuality. The number of pupils who are persistently absent has also reduced. The recently appointed learning mentor rigorously monitors rates of absence and lateness and works with families to encourage more pupils to attend school regularly.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Leaders, managers and the governing body are focused on the key priorities for the development of the academy's effectiveness, including raising attainment for all groups of pupils by accelerating their progress. In the first two terms following its opening, the academy's leaders ensured that much-needed improvements to the achievement measures at the end of Year 6 were made. However, some aspects of the academy's development plans were less rigorously pursued. As a result, there is some catching up to do in leaders' evaluations of the impact of its work. The development plans for this academic year do not have criteria by which the success

of actions can be judged. The Principal is aware that more can be done to ensure that delegation of responsibilities across the leadership team is effective and that all leaders have a clear view of their strategic role across the academy's work.

A significant amount of input from external consultants has been utilised to 'plug the gap' where needs have arisen. This has included: reviews of the academy's provision for special educational needs and the Early Years Foundation Stage; regular checks and support for financial management; training by subject consultants in English and mathematics; and an external review of overall progress since the academy opened.

Leaders have an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses and know where improvements are required. They have developed tracking procedures which record pupils' achievements, although this is not analysed sufficiently to tease out the most important information about the performance of groups of pupils. As a result, teachers are not held to account enough for the progress made by all of the children in their class.

The newly formed governing body brings a wide range of skills and expertise and is becoming more involved in the strategic direction of the academy. Relevant and meaningful committees have been formed that are aligned to the school's priorities, including working with families and the local community. Some committee meetings have taken place but at present the governing body does not understand the performance data well enough to challenge leaders more rigorously when holding them to account.

Appropriate efforts are being made to improve the quality of the curriculum and its role in enhancing pupils' experiences and promoting further their development of basic skills.

External support

The academy has engaged with a wide range of external support to assist leaders in gaining an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses. Teachers are responding well to their work with consultants to improve the quality of teaching. The impact of this is beginning to be evident in some steady improvements in the academy's work.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the governing body's skills in understanding data on progress, particularly that made by all groups of pupils, in order to more rigorously monitor the impact of the academy's actions.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jane Millward
Her Majesty's Inspector