

Serco Inspections
Cedar House
21 William Street T 0300 123 1231
Edgbaston Text Phone: 0161 6188524
Birmingham enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
B15 1LH www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0121 683 3288
Direct email: beverley.joyner@serco.com



23 November 2012

Mrs Z Harrington
Acting Principal
West Grantham Academy Spitalgate
Trent Road
Grantham
NG31 7XQ

Dear Mrs Harrington

Special measures monitoring inspection of West Grantham Academy Spitalgate

Following my visit with Joan McPhail, Additional Inspector, to your academy on 21 and 22 November 2012, 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 academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures, following the inspection which took place in May 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 academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The academy is permitted to appoint newly qualified teachers, at its own discretion, although this decision will be reviewed at subsequent monitoring visits.

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 Academies Advisers Unit of the Department for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Diocese of Lincoln.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that they are consistently good or better by:
 - tailoring the work set so that it provides manageable challenge for all pupils
 - giving staff more opportunities to share and build on good practice, using strengths from within the trust
 - ensuring expectations are consistently high for all pupils in all classes
 - rigorously monitoring and evaluating pupils' work and the quality of teaching across the academy, putting the emphasis on learning and developing teachers' accountability for pupils' progress.

- Accelerate progress and raise attainment, ensuring that all pupils make at least the expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 by:
 - improving pupils' skills in constructing sentences, punctuation and spelling and increasing opportunities for extended writing across the curriculum
 - developing and consolidating basic calculation skills and their application to mathematical problem-solving activities
 - developing an academy approach to teaching handwriting and correct letter formation
 - developing and implementing an academy marking policy, ensuring that target setting and marking procedures consistently give pupils a clear understanding of their next steps for learning.

- Develop learning experiences for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - ensuring each activity, whether led by adults or chosen by the children themselves, has a clear learning purpose and is suitably challenging
 - giving children daily opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills in a structured manner, so children are better prepared for Year 1.

- Strengthen the capacity of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by:
 - reviewing and revising the roles and responsibilities of the leadership team so that it is more effective in driving school improvement
 - developing a rigorous approach to assessing reading, writing and mathematics so that data used for tracking pupils' progress are reliable and accurate
 - developing the role of the Board of Directors in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, and holding leaders to account.

Special measures: monitoring of West Grantham Academy Spitalgate

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 21–22 November 2012

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, looked carefully at documents and met with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the West Grantham Academies Trust, the acting Principal, nominated staff, a group of pupils and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Context

There have been many staff changes since the last inspection. Six teachers joined the staff in September, including the acting Principal.

At the last inspection, the Year 5 and 6 pupils were taught jointly with pupils at The Earl of Dysart Primary School, the partner primary academy in the West Grantham Academies Trust. Since September the Academies Trust has amalgamated all the primary-age pupils and staff from the neighbouring schools: younger pupils are taught at the Spitalgate campus and Years 5 and 6 on the Earl of Dysart Primary School site. This arrangement is the first stage of a more formal reorganisation that is due to take place in January 2013.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Standards remain low. Unvalidated results in the most recent Key Stage 2 tests and Key Stage 1 assessments in 2012 show a marked improvement when compared with the previous year, and have reversed the downward trend in performance. However, despite these increases, achievement was inadequate in 2012 because too few pupils made the two levels of progress expected between Key Stages 1 and 2 in reading, writing or mathematics.

Since the inspection, the academy has sensibly carried out thorough assessments of pupils' work in reading, writing and mathematics, and has used external consultants to make sure it is accurate. These assessments indicate not only that standards are generally well below age-related expectations, but also that many pupils have fallen behind. Although some Year 6 pupils have made reasonable progress in reading, they have not made sufficient gains in either mathematics or writing. Well-considered additional support such as the two-week summer school gives a much needed boost for pupils most at risk of underachievement, but improving the quality of day-to-day teaching has, rightly, been the academy's main priority. The most recent assessments show that progress is starting to accelerate, but that the speed of improvement varies between different year groups.

Inspection evidence confirms the marked improvement in the quality of pupils' learning. Pupils made impressive gains in a large majority of the English and

mathematics lessons observed during the visit. This improvement reflects the stronger teaching and the better use of assessment. However, the quality of learning required improvement in some sessions, either because work was too difficult for some pupils or because learning activities were not planned with clear enough aims.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is much better. All teachers have participated in either the 'improving teacher programme' or the 'outstanding teacher programme', and academy monitoring shows steady improvement since September. In more than half the observations during the visit, teaching was judged to be good. Although the most obvious improvement is in the classroom environment, it is the sharper lesson planning, with suitably demanding learning aims for different pupils at different ability levels, that is driving better learning and progress. Securing reliable assessment information has been essential because teachers now understand pupils' capabilities, what they should achieve and where there are gaps in their learning. Importantly, teachers are confident in their judgements when assessing pupils' work in English and mathematics. Sharper assessment underpins effective target-setting and marking, both of which are beginning to steer more rapid improvements in the standard of pupils' work.

Lessons are calm and purposeful. Teachers skilfully use their interactive whiteboards to recap work and to explain and model new learning. They prepare interesting resources and plan engaging activities so that all the pupils can participate fully. In their phonics (the sounds letters make) session, for example, Year 2 pupils enjoyed drawing letters on each other's back with their finger. Many activities, like collecting ideas on sticky notes, drafting answers on mini-whiteboards and using miniature dinosaurs to explore problems in mathematics, encourage pupils to work together to draft their answers and refine their ideas so that their answers are better structured and more carefully completed. While pupils are working independently, teachers have simple but effective strategies for checking that pupils understand the work.

Lessons that required improvement were not pitched at quite the right level for all the pupils. When this was the case, teachers' questioning could not rescue the situation because pupils were unsure of the answers and had not learned anything new. In some lessons, planning showed that what teachers expected pupils to achieve was not demanding enough.

Improving children's education in the Early Years Foundation Stage was a key priority from the last inspection, and it has been transformed. Learning activities are carefully planned so that children's skills in literacy and numeracy are systematically developed on a daily basis. All classroom and outdoor activities have a clear learning focus, and children already know how to make sensible choices when working without direct adult supervision.

It is clear that many older pupils have weak reading and writing skills, and when their basic grasp of phonics is weak they struggle with unfamiliar words. Teachers are

therefore working hard on improving pupils' writing by focusing on spelling, phonics and handwriting. They can already demonstrate much improvement, since the start of term, in the quality and accuracy of pupils' extended writing in their 'principal books'.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils respond positively to the high expectations and encouragement of staff. During the visit they behaved very well in lessons and at break times, despite the dreadful weather. They settle quickly, follow instructions and cooperate well when asked to work in pairs and small groups. Younger children in the nursery, Reception and Year 1 classes have responded well to the more structured approach to learning. Individuals who struggle to behave appropriately are generally well managed, so that their moodiness does not affect the learning of others. The pupils' greater enjoyment of learning can be seen not only in the way that they respond to the more lively and challenging teaching, but also in their better attendance, which has increased to 96% so far this term.

The pupils know their targets in English and mathematics, and understand what they need to do to improve their work because marking is both thorough and detailed. They also know how important it is that they respond to the guidance provided by teachers. They are keen to do well and like being rewarded with their 'didi dots'.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The Chief Executive Officer of the Academies Trust communicates a clear vision for rapid improvement and provides good strategic leadership for the academy. The appointment of the acting Principal has transformed the academy's leadership and its day-to-day management. She leads by example, is unequivocal about what she expects and models what is required. This approach has given new and existing staff the structure to develop their own planning and the confidence that they are on the right track. Staff have consequently worked very hard to make necessary improvements in teaching and the curriculum, but better team-working and support from senior leaders has also enabled teachers to work more efficiently. Staff understand their individual roles and their responsibility for making sure pupils achieve well.

The Academy Trust has made well-considered decisions about staffing and the reorganisation of the school, and has spent a considerable amount of money to improve the environment for learning. Shrewd appointments since the last inspection, including the phase leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage, have greatly strengthened teaching. The physical changes are immediately obvious, with an excellent covered area and an outdoor environment that is better organised to promote learning for younger children, with interesting spaces to work and new resources linked with properly guided activities. Classrooms have become welcoming and stimulating places to learn; wall displays provide helpful support for pupils' work and progress, and also celebrate their achievements. Parents and carers of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage can see for themselves the progress being

made; they can admire displays of their children's work and browse through the helpful 'learning journey' file.

The academy's awareness of its own strengths and weaknesses is appropriately based on regular monitoring and careful analysis of assessment data, each of which is checked by external consultants. Senior leaders, including the Academies Trust lead for teaching and learning, routinely check teachers' planning, the pupils' work and progress, and the quality of teaching. These checks are thorough and firm, but also helpful in steering improvement.

The Chief Executive Officer, as a key member of the Academy Trust, keeps directors and governors well informed about the progress and performance of the academy. However, although the governing body has commissioned independent reviews, for example of provision and leadership, it relies too much on the knowledge and expertise of the Chief Executive Officer. Governors have had suitable training, for example on the analysis of performance data, and occasionally visit the academy, but the structure of their statement of action does not make it easy to fulfil their monitoring role.

External support

Although the governing body's action plan has not been amended, the effective way in which it has been applied by senior leaders shows that it is fit for purpose. Governors and senior leaders recognise the need for external support and guidance, and have been active in seeking it. The academy has responded to the clear guidance provided by consultants from the Department for Education, and has sensibly bought in focused support from a wide range of external providers. The impact of these links, for example with good or outstanding schools, is already clear in better teaching and learning.