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Mr M Collin
Headteacher
Erdington Hall Primary School
Ryland Road
Erdington
Birmingham
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Dear Mr Collin

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Erdington Hall Primary School

Following my visit with Sandra Hayes, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 5–6 February 2013, 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 headteacher, members of the governing body, groups of pupils, staff and a representative from the Ninestiles Academy Trust.

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

The academy has 454 pupils and is larger than the average-sized primary school. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language are higher than average. The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is also higher than average. The

proportions of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported by school action plus or a statement of special educational needs, and those supported by school action, are average. More pupils start or leave school during the year than is usual.

The school converted to an academy in June 2012. It is sponsored by the Ninestiles Academy. It is governed by a local academy governing body under the control of the Ninestiles Academy Trust. Currently, the school is advertising for three teachers to replace those that have left since the academy opened. The headteacher was appointed in 2012.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

School assessment information shows that the academy has built successfully on the much improved Year 6 national assessment results for English and mathematics in July 2012. The academy has set aspirational but achievable targets to raise pupils' standards further. Assessment information shows that they are currently on course to meet them.

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skill development that is typically well below the levels expected nationally for their age. This is particularly the case for language and numeracy skills. They make a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes. By the time they enter Year 1 the gap between their language and numeracy development and the national average has closed considerably, but it remains lower than expected for many of them. Throughout the rest of the academy the progress pupils make in English and mathematics is accelerating, but uneven. The best progress is in writing, where concerted efforts to improve the quality of teaching have been successful. Generally, pupils make rapid progress in Years 1 and 2, and Years 5 and 6. Assessment results show that the gap between the school standards and those expected nationally in reading, writing and mathematics is narrowing strongly in these year groups. Progress is slower in Years 3 and 4 because the teaching is not as good.

Pupils who speak English as an additional language, and particularly those newly arrived in the country, make similar progress to most other pupils because the extra help they receive is effective. Generally, pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make slightly slower progress. Nevertheless the gap between their standards and those expected nationally is narrowing. The school is aware of their slower progress, and is examining the additional help provided for these pupils closely to make it more effective. Some minority ethnic groups, including Pakistani pupils, make better progress than others. Throughout the school more-able pupils do not make the rapid progress that they could, so the proportion exceeding the standards expected nationally for all pupils is low.

The quality of teaching

Since the academy opened, school leaders have improved teaching by providing clear guidance on what constitutes good practice. For example, all teachers are now using assessment information to group pupils for different work by ability, and providing additional help where they think it is needed. The proportion of inadequate teaching has reduced considerably, and it now rarely occurs. Much more teaching is now good, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Years 5 and 6. However, in all these years and in Years 3 and 4, some teaching still requires improvement. The effectiveness of the help provided by teaching assistants also varies.

One of the main weaknesses in teaching is that the pupils are not sufficiently stretched, as teachers' expectations of what they can achieve are not high enough. This is particularly the case for the more-able pupils. Often they are left to work on their own while teachers and teaching assistants concentrate on other groups of pupils. Generally, teachers spend the first part of each lesson explaining to pupils what they will be learning about. While this explanation is appropriate for some groups, it lacks relevance for others. As one pupil explained, 'After we have listened to the teacher, they still have to come to our table to tell us what to do.'

The teaching of reading has strengthened in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Consequently, standards are rising and in Year 2 they are currently above expectations. During the morning pupils are split into groups for lessons where they learn to recognise the sounds that letters make (phonics). The quality of teaching and learning in these groups varies too much. It is excellent in some but much weaker in others.

Teaching in mathematics is not as strong as in reading and writing. The academy leaders have identified that aspects such as data handling, measure, shape and space are not taught well enough. One reason for this is that pupils do not get enough opportunities to practise and apply the skills learnt in mathematics lessons when they have lessons in other subjects.

Marking in English is better than that in mathematics. In most writing books, pupils benefit from useful advice on how they should improve their work. They also have time to respond to this, consolidating what they have learnt. In mathematics the quality of marking is much more variable. Often the advice given is of little help in guiding pupils on how to make improvements to their work.

A common strength of teaching is that in all lessons teachers have created a culture where all pupils try their best and success is celebrated. Even in the lessons seen that required improvement, nearly all pupils were working hard and cooperating with each other. This is promoting their spiritual, moral and social development well.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The pupils told inspectors that they are pleased with the improvements in behaviour since the academy opened. Most pupils are polite, friendly and considerate to each other and adults. In lessons, good behaviour is usual. It varies a little more around the school. For example, pupils explained that at lunch-times a few let themselves down by behaving inappropriately.

The school teaches pupils about how to deal with bullying. For example, pupils explained what they would do if they were subject to racial abuse. Most pupils feel safe in school. They also explained that teachers deal with any incidents of bullying promptly. Sometimes this does not stop it from happening over time because the teacher deals with the incident in isolation, not spotting that this may be part of a pattern of events occurring inside and outside the school.

Attendance has improved considerably. It was very low, but is now average. Also, the additional help for pupils whose circumstances makes them vulnerable, and for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, has been effective in reducing the exclusion rate. Exclusion is now a rare occurrence.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Since it opened, the academy has greatly strengthened its capacity for sustained improvement. The headteacher has brought a wealth of experience and expertise to the academy. He has very effectively communicated the required higher expectations for the quality of teaching, learning and achievement to the whole community. Nearly all staff have risen to the challenge. The result is better teaching and faster progress that is strongly narrowing the attainment gap for most groups of pupils.

Staff with leadership responsibilities have a very clear understanding of where improvement is required. In writing and reading, which was the priority, they have made the most improvement. Mathematics is now a priority for improvement and school leaders have accurately identified what needs to be done to improve teaching and learning still further.

Underpinning this leadership are well-developed management practices. The school improvement plan is based on sound self-evaluation, and the astute checks on the quality of teaching have led to the rapid improvement to date. These are closely linked to the procedures to lead improvements to teaching, which are sophisticated and a model of good practice. They methodically draw on evidence about the quality of teaching over time so that challenging targets for improvement are set for each teacher. Teachers understand that if targets are not met they will not be rewarded financially. Teachers also benefit from tailored support to improve their teaching. For

example, those who are judged to require improvement embark on a programme designed to make their teaching good.

The governing body has a mix of experienced and recently appointed members. Less experienced governors are benefiting from the expertise of the Trust to learn how to hold the academy to account for its strategic development. For example, they are now much more aware of the links between teachers' performance and pay, and understand that they are responsible for ensuring that school leaders carry out performance reviews with the necessary rigour.

The curriculum is currently being reviewed. Understandably, the academy has concentrated on improving English and mathematics lessons. The curriculum is most effective for reading and writing and in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The quality of teaching and learning in mathematics lessons has improved, but the curriculum does not sufficiently promote the application of mathematics in other subjects. The quality of the curriculum for other subjects requires more improvement. Skills in subjects such as science are not being developed well enough. The curriculum does not promote cultural development well enough.

Safeguarding procedures meet current national requirements. All groups of pupils are having an increasingly equal opportunity to succeed as teaching and learning improve across the school.

External support

The academy is benefiting greatly from being a member of the Ninestiles Academy Trust. Leadership, governance and the teaching of English and mathematics have strengthened as a result of the sharing of expertise. The Trust has set the headteacher extremely challenging targets for improvement and providing him with the necessary resources to make them achievable. To date they have aided the establishment of a dedicated staff team who are working effectively together to improve education in the academy.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise standards in English and mathematics to at least average by:
 - increasing the proportion of good teaching in all years, but especially Years 3 and 4
 - raising expectations for what the more-able pupils can achieve, and then providing greater challenge in lessons
 - ensuring that pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs progress as rapidly as other pupils
 - reducing variability to raise the quality of phonics teaching.

- Improve the curriculum in all subjects so that:

- pupils have regular opportunities to practise and apply their mathematical skills in a range of contexts
- skill development across a range of subjects other than English and mathematics is improved
- cultural development is promoted well.

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

Tim Bristow
Her Majesty's Inspector