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Mr Gavin Bradley
Headteacher
White Hall Academy
Melbourne Road
Clacton-on-Sea
CO15 3SP

Dear Mr Bradley

No formal designation monitoring inspection of White Hall Academy

Following my visit with John Mitcheson Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 27–28 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, the executive headteacher of the sponsoring academy trust, the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor who were both representatives of the sponsors.

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 predecessor school closed in August 2012 and White Hall academy opened on 1 September in the same buildings. The number of pupils on roll has risen, reflecting the school's enhanced reputation in the local community. Three teachers left at the end of the summer term. Five new colleagues, including four newly qualified teachers, were appointed to permanent posts at the start of the school year and one

teacher was promoted to lead literacy in Key Stage 1. HMI observed all staff teach and offered professional feedback.

The associate headteacher from the predecessor school, along with the head of teaching and learning, had been seconded from Lyons Hall Primary School. They were appointed as headteacher and head of teaching and learning of Whitehall Academy from 1 September 2012. They work in partnership with the Learning Pathways Academies Trust and Lyons Hall Primary School.

The academy is nearly twice the size of the average primary school. The large majority of pupils are White British. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is average, although the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is low. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is high and rising. As a result, the academy receives additional government funding (the pupil premium) for over half of the pupils in each year group, a figure well above the national average.

The proportion of pupils who need extra help with their learning because they are disabled or have special educational needs is above average. These include pupils supported at school action, school action plus and those with a statement of special educational needs.

The academy has early years child care provision for pupils aged 2 to 3 years; 'Little Sparkles' is managed by the academy governing body. A large Early Years Foundation Stage provision includes Nursery and Reception classes.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Attainment is rising in all year groups although variations remain between reading, writing and mathematics. Pupil progress is improving, continuing a trend established when the current leadership team were seconded to the predecessor school. The large numbers of pupils supported by initiatives funded by the pupil premium often make better progress than the rest of the school.

Half of the pupils who join the Reception class have spent time in the vibrant Nursery provision where their progress is well documented. However, significant numbers of pupils join the academy during the latter part of the Reception Year and above average numbers join other year groups during Key Stage 2; the gaps in their prior learning remain evident. The academy is building a detailed evidence base to document the progress of all pupils.

The rising proportion of good teaching is improving current pupil progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the local authority has expressed its concern regarding the accuracy of the Key Stage 1 National Curriculum scores recorded by the predecessor school prior to the arrival of the current leadership team.

The quality of teaching

The increasing proportion of pupils making above average progress since the academy opened is a testimony to the improvements secured in teaching and support. Some lessons observed required improvement, often where small organisational issues needed adjustment. In an outstanding Year 1 literacy lesson, the pupils' writing improved rapidly because of the very effective blending of speaking and listening tasks, driven forward by incisive teacher questions. Similarly, in an outstanding Reception class session the teacher managed an effective mix of activities very well. The children's focus and discussion was intense and the well-organised 'snack café' led by support staff created effective opportunities for individual debate.

Teaching provides clear expectations of the social and moral standards required of the pupils. Marking is completed regularly but not all comments are in easy language for pupils to understand. Some support staff listen carefully to the pupils' ideas and question effectively to improve learning. In those lessons where speaking and listening were prioritised, pupils consistently made good progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The pupil's behaviour was a positive feature of every lesson. Attitudes to learning are often enthusiastic. Attendance has risen significantly in the last year and is close to the national average. Exclusions have declined dramatically and are currently low. Movement around the academy is considerate and pupils are caring of each other.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The energy and focus of the leadership team has driven the notable improvements in achievement, teaching, behaviour and attendance. The promotion of equality of opportunity is a strength.

Provision is well planned and resources are used well. Engagement with parents is strong and the child care provision offered in 'Little Sparkles' has a very strong community support focus.

The academy development plan is under constant review by senior staff. They are relentless in making sure that all pupils in the school receive the best education possible. However, they acknowledge that more needs to be done to raise standards and improve pupil progress.

The governing body brings considerable experience to challenging discussions with all staff and ensure that decisions about teachers' pay are closely linked to the effectiveness of their teaching, and the roles they fulfil. The governing body ensures that requirements for the safeguarding of pupils are met. However, they had not

ensured the academy web site contained the required information regarding pupil premium expenditure.

External support

The academy has gained substantially from the partnership with the Learning Pathways Academies Trust and Lyons Hall Primary School in helping to raise the pupils' attainment.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that pupil progress is clearly documented from the time the academy opened.

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

David Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector