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7 March 2013

Ms Kirstie Fulthorpe
Principal
Harris Primary Academy Philip Lane
Philip Lane
London
N15 4AB

Dear Ms Fulthorpe

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Harris Primary Academy Philip Lane

Following my visit with Robin Hammerton, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on Tuesday 5 and Wednesday 6 March 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 Principal, Vice Principal and Assistant Principal, staff with leadership responsibilities, a group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of the sponsors. They spoke informally with other staff and pupils during the course of the inspection. Over half of the observations of teaching and learning were carried out together with members of the senior leadership team.

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 463 pupils on roll; this is larger than most primary schools. Most pupils come from a range of minority ethnic groups with the largest groups being from other White backgrounds, and Black African heritage. A high proportion speaks English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils included in the academy's register of special educational needs is a little higher than average although the proportion at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average. Many pupils join the academy or leave it at various times through the year. A much larger than average number of pupils is known to be eligible for free funding from the pupil premium.

The school became an academy in September 2012 and is sponsored by the Harris Federation. Approximately two thirds of staff from the predecessor school transferred to the academy. Since opening, there have been further changes of staff: the new Principal joined the academy in December 2012 and the Assistant Principal joined in January 2013; three teachers have left since the academy opened and three more will leave at Easter. The academy is currently recruiting new staff but, at present, five staff are on temporary contracts.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

The academy's information from assessments shows that the proportion of pupils attaining the levels expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics is below what it should be in all year groups. It is especially low in some classes in Key Stage 2 where there has been weak teaching in the past and, here, pupils have much ground to make up. The progress that pupils make is still patchy overall but there are signs of improvement. In Years 2, 5 and 6, for example, pupils are catching up faster. All pupils in Year 6 are on track to make the progress they should and some are making more progress than expected. Given that pupils started Key Stage 2 at a very low level, the proportion reaching the levels of attainment expected of 11-year-olds is likely to be lower than average. Nonetheless, this accelerated progress is helping to reduce the gap between the levels attained at the academy and those attained nationally. Pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding are doing relatively well, as are those who speak English as an additional language. Pupils in London Class - a daily, specialist provision for pupils in Key Stage 2 with complex special needs - are making good strides towards meeting the small-step targets that have been set for them. The academy's leaders are patently aware of the need to accelerate the progress of pupils in other year groups.

Children start the Early Years Foundation Stage, with skills, knowledge and experiences that are lower than typical. The academy is working to secure an accurate picture of children's starting points and their progress in all areas of learning in order to plan structured activities at the right level. Generally, activities

promote children's independence and all but a few children in Reception are able to make sensible choices. Here, children have plenty of chances to practise writing. In Nursery, activities are not always tightly focused to make sure children gain what they should from them. Examples seen included children's aimless play in the sand and lengthy periods of play on the trikes with little input from an adult to encourage children to try other activities.

Lessons observed and pupils' books confirm the academy's assessment information. Progress is better in those lessons where teachers give pupils slightly different tasks that consolidate their understanding and then take their learning on. In some lessons observed, some groups did not make enough progress because the task was either too hard or too easy. The pace of learning is not always quick enough and, in some classes, pupils are slow to get down to their work. Pupils are learning about the features of writing and are learning to write in different styles, for different purposes but slow to put pencil to paper. Although there have been improvements in the quality and quantity of pupils' writing, weaknesses in spelling and the structure of their writing, remain. The quality of pupils' presentation of their written work is not always high enough. By sharp contrast, the quality of pupils' art work is better than might be expected for their age. Around the academy, there is clear evidence of a broad experience of different artistic techniques and skills. The way that the work is displayed around the corridors celebrates pupils' achievements but also sets a level of expectation that is not replicated consistently in classrooms.

The quality of teaching

Inspectors and senior leaders were in agreement about the key strengths and areas for improvement in the teaching that was observed together. While some positive features were observed in most lessons, there is more to do to raise the quality of teaching so that it is consistent across the academy.

It is clear that pupils take responsibility for their own learning when given the chance. Examples seen included sophisticated conversations between pairs of Year 6 pupils about the book they were reading, pupils in Year 3 giving each other feedback on their writing and several examples in pupils' books of them assessing their own work against criteria provided by the teacher. Generally pupils know their targets and are motivated by being clear about the levels they are trying to achieve. Many receive well-targeted support from teaching assistants who have a clear brief for their role in supporting pupils' progress in lessons.

There is some variability in how successfully teachers plan activities that are at the right level for different pupils. Since December, the academy has embarked on a new programme for teaching pupils the links between letters of the alphabet and the sounds they represent (phonics). Although staff are still getting used to the highly structured nature of the programme and its resources, there is no doubt of the positive impact on the development of pupils' phonic knowledge and the skills they need to help them with their reading and writing. As yet, staff are not always confident to adapt the content of the programme to the precise needs of the pupils

in their group. A weakness noted by the academy's leaders and seen by inspectors is the accuracy with which adults pronounce sounds for pupils to copy.

Teachers' expectations are not always high enough and this means that they do not consistently set hard enough work for pupils. Nor do they always expect enough in terms of the quality and quantity of pupils' written work. At times, teachers talk too much and give pupils too many instructions so that the time available for pupils to complete their work is reduced. Teachers are working hard to improve the quality of their marking and, in all year groups, there is some strong marking that tells pupils how to improve their work. Interestingly, pupils perceive that orange marking (points for improvement) is usually given to those who have not listened or achieved the objective and that those who do what they are asked to do not get further suggestions for improvement. Sometimes, there are too many points for improvement. The most effective marking is that which points to one or two key areas to improve and is followed up by pupils so that it has an impact on improving the next piece of work. Teachers' handwriting is not always a good model for pupils to emulate.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

For the most part, pupils' behaviour is positive. Their conduct and behaviour around the academy generally leads to a calm atmosphere. Pupils are polite, welcoming and get on well with each other. Playtimes are a little boisterous as pupils let off steam but within the academy's expected boundaries and without compromising safety. Pupils confirm there is very little bullying, although there is some teasing that they do not like. They are absolutely clear that any disagreements will be sorted out by adults. Any incidents of racist behaviour, though rare, are taken seriously and resolved quickly. Similarly staff are quick to tackle any occurrence of homophobic language. In lessons, pupils are cooperative and, where teaching is pitched at the right level, well-focused on the task at hand. However, pupils tend to lose focus and concentration when teaching or activities are not at the right level. Pupils are discerning about what works well in class and what does not. They recognise that things are improving and like coming to the academy. More and more are coming regularly as a result of the academy's work with parents although attendance figures remain below the national average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

By and large, self-evaluation is accurate and the Principal has a clear understanding of the actions that are needed to secure improvement quickly. This is reflected in the academy's improvement plan which focuses rightly on improving teaching to raise standards and strengthening leadership. Since December, there has been a change in culture and expectation with more demands placed on teachers to be accountable for the progress of pupils in their class. Senior leaders check regularly that actions are happening as planned and that they are having the intended impact on raising pupils' standards. Thorough analysis of information about pupils' progress helps to

underpin the way that senior leaders measure what is and is not working. Classroom observations are used well to identify what teachers need to do to improve. Phase and subject leaders have new, clearly defined, roles in contributing to the academy's improvement which they undertake with energy and enthusiasm. They have begun to check that actions are taken and agreed practices are followed, but are yet to measure the impact of their actions on standards. They see their role as one which provides support for their colleagues rather than as one in which they are accountable for improving the areas they lead. This is a layer of leadership and management that needs strengthening quickly.

The governing body is led by an experienced chair who has a good understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. As a former member of the Interim Executive Board of the predecessor school she provides continuity within governance. Many other governors are new but bring a wealth of expertise and experience from other walks of life. They are getting to know the academy quickly. Senior leaders and governors know that there is more to do to win the hearts and minds of parents, carers and community members. A positive start has been made in the Early Years Foundation Stage in getting parents involved in their children's learning. The academy's capacity to secure further improvement is strong at senior leadership level, supported by strengths in governance and the Harris Federation, but weaker among other leaders who are still developing their leadership role.

External support

The academy receives strong support from the Harris Federation. A raft of mechanisms ensures that the academy's leaders are challenged rigorously about the quality of provision but supported to make the necessary improvements. The balance between support and challenge is a fine one that enables the Principal to carry out her role efficiently. Importantly, practical support from consultants working directly with individual teachers to improve their practice is beginning to make a positive difference. Regular training for governors is strengthening their capacity to challenge the academy in their role as critical friends.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop the skills of phase and subject leaders so that they are able to go beyond simply checking what is happening to evaluating the impact of what has been done and then lead and be accountable for the next phase of development.
- Raise teachers' expectations of the quality, quantity and level of pupils' work; give pupils challenging tasks at the right level; and provide pupils with a consistent, academy-wide role model that promotes high standards of presentation and strong attitudes to learning.

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 Wotherspoon
Her Majesty's Inspector