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19 March 2013

Mr C Hotham
Interim Principal
St Ursula's E-ACT Primary Academy
Brecon Road
Bristol
BS9 4DT

Dear Mr Hotham

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to St Ursula's E-ACT Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 19 March 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection on 16–17 January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, members of senior leadership team, the Local Governing Body and a representative of the sponsor. I also evaluated the school's action plan, visited classes and scrutinised other documentation, such as teachers' lesson plans and the records of Local Governing Body meetings.

Context

Since the last inspection, the substantive principal has retired following a period of ill health. The interim principal took up post in February 2013 and will lead the school until December 2013. The academy has expanded the senior leadership team by appointing three middle leaders, on a short-term basis. The vice-principal has taken responsibility for leading mathematics recently.

Main findings

The interim principal has set about getting to know the academy swiftly. He and the vice-principal have examined the plans for lessons and undertaken several lesson observations. They have given teachers informative feedback that focuses closely on the progress that pupils make. The interim principal has responded quickly when teaching is less than good. A suitable training and support programme has been commissioned for six teachers to address development points identified during lesson observations. Staff meetings are focused more closely on improving teaching and learning. At a recent meeting, teachers looked at pupils' work in mathematics books to confirm the grades that had been awarded. As a result of this meeting, the teachers agreed to undertake an assessment task so that teachers have a better understanding of what is required for each level.

The academy's senior leaders have involved staff and governors in writing a detailed plan of action to address the issues raised in the last inspection. The action plan is comprehensive and sets a clear direction for improvement. Actions address each key issue systematically and interim objectives enable leaders to review the difference that actions have made. The responsibility for checking the progress the school is making is shared widely, but it is not clear how and when governors will monitor the school's work first-hand.

Middle leaders have been appointed recently and are beginning to settle into their new roles. The senior leadership team meet weekly to review the difference that actions are making in addressing the key issues from the last inspection. Teachers have improved the way that they plan lessons, but the plans lack information on pupils' current achievements, so is difficult to check that the tasks meet the capabilities of all pupils.

The Local Governing Body has improved the committee structure and the way that meetings are managed. An external review of governance has been commissioned and the skills of the members are being audited. Governors have been appointed to designated roles to ensure that statutory responsibilities are met. Governors are beginning to request more information from leaders, such as data on the progress that pupils make. Records of meetings do not show the questions that have been asked or the answers given by leaders. Governors are beginning to visit the school more frequently to gain first-hand experience of the academy's work. The purpose of these visits is not yet linked to the academy's action plan.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, I recommended that further action is taken to:

- record pupils' prior attainment in lesson plans to ensure that learning objectives and tasks are set at the right level

- amend the post-Ofsted action plan to set out how and when governors will check the progress the school is making
- ensure that records of meetings of the Local Governing Body record the questions asked by governors and the answers provided by leaders.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The academy has drawn effectively on external support. The sponsor has increased its contact with the school and brokered a programme of training and support for individual teachers. The newly-appointed special educational needs coordinator has been mentored by an experienced colleague from a local E-Act academy. Plans are in place to extend this model of support to the leadership of mathematics. A local authority consultant has reviewed provision for mathematics and written a policy to set out the academy's approaches to teach calculation.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Local Governing Body and the academy sponsor.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hancock
Her Majesty's Inspector