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No formal designation post-inspection letter to academy

13 May 2013

Ms Louise Saunders
Associate Headteacher
Hasting Hill Academy
Tilbury Road
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR3 4LY

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Hasting Hill Academy

Dear Ms Saunders

Following my visit with Christine Inkster, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 9 and 10 May 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 acting chief executive officer of the WISE academies trust, the associate headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, senior and middle leaders and groups of pupils.

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

Hasting Hill Academy formally opened on 1 December 2012. The academy is larger than most primary schools and over half of all pupils are known to be entitled to free schools meals. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic groups. A relatively high proportion of pupils have special educational needs. The acting chief executive

officer from the trust led the predecessor school prior to the opening of the academy and until the associate headteacher took up her post in February 2013.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Inspection evidence confirms that standards are rising and the pace of improvement is quickening. The large majority of pupils are now making good progress. Long-standing underachievement is being tackled robustly with weaknesses in pupils' literacy and numeracy skills being successfully addressed. Checks on pupils' progress are regular and detailed. Teachers are fully aware of the on-going learning needs of all pupils and they make suitable provision in each lesson for them. The use of teaching assistants is providing specific individualised extra help when it is needed.

Children enter the Nursery class with skills which are below those expected. Nonetheless, expectations of what they can achieve are high. Tracking evidence and work in books show that the large majority of pupils in each key stage are now making better than expected progress in English and mathematics. This applies to almost all groups. The effective use of pupil premium monies (funding which is providing additional resources for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals) is resulting in these pupils making better progress in some year groups than other pupils. Carefully targeted support is helping lower ability pupils to successfully overcome difficulties in reading, writing and mathematics. A small number of pupils identified as having special educational needs continue to struggle although recent evidence suggests that these pupils too are now improving at a faster rate.

Changes to the way reading is taught are proving to be effective in promoting pupils' enjoyment and raising standards. The use of phonics (the linking of letters and the sounds they represent) is well-grounded in the academy and this approach is being used confidently by pupils when tackling unfamiliar words. Pupils have wide-ranging opportunities to write in a range of subjects and at length. This is undoubtedly reflected in their enjoyment of writing and their willingness to work independently and over a sustained period. Pupils work industriously in mathematics lessons also; benefitting from the well-thought-out tasks which teachers are using to improve key mathematics skills. This approach is enabling pupils to apply these skills in a range of problem solving contexts.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is predominantly good because of the actions taken by academy leaders and the manner in which teachers have set about making improvements to their work. Training to improve teachers' skills is well coordinated and accurately focused.

Almost all lessons are characterised by a brisk pace, with regular changes of activity to keep pupils motivated and interested. Teachers are well prepared, giving pupils clear expectations of what they should learn. Teaching assistants provide good support to those pupils who need additional help to catch up. Phonics is taught

effectively through a systematic and consistent approach adopted in all parts of the school. This is hastening pupils' acquisition of skills in reading and writing.

Teachers check regularly that pupils understand what is being taught and so have a detailed understanding of the respective needs of individual children. This is reflected in teachers' planning so that activities are provided to meet the varying levels of ability in each class. Misconceptions are clarified and teachers use their good subject knowledge and questioning to extend and challenge pupils' thinking. Children's acquisition of speaking and listening skills in the Nursery and Reception classes is progressing well. Staff are providing effectively for children across all areas of learning. Good attention is being paid to help children develop their early writing skills.

Marking of pupils' work and the feedback they receive are helpful in moving learning forward. Pupils are given clear information about what they have done well and how they can improve. Crucially, there is evidence in pupils' workbooks that they are being given opportunities to act on the teacher's advice to correct their work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils consistently behave well and show very positive attitudes towards all aspects of school life. A strong work ethic is evident in all classes. Pupils try hard and cooperate together constructively on the tasks they are given.

Attendance levels are rising. This is happening partly because pupils enjoy being in school, but crucially through the academy's forthright approach to tackling persistent absence which is paying off. Administrative staff are quick to challenge non-attendance.

Pupils know they are safe in school and point to convincing evidence which shows they are alert to danger, whatever the source. Improvements to site security have demonstrated to pupils that staff give high priority to their welfare. Pupils speak confidently about how adults help to resolve difficulties. They say that bullying does not occur but do say that name calling, by a few pupils, causes upset.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The academy's leadership has benefitted substantially from the support provided by the trust. In particular, the highly effective leadership of the acting chief executive, both before and after the move to academy status, has been pivotal to the improvements made. Under her leadership weaknesses have been tackled decisively. The restructuring of management roles and changes in personnel responsibilities have ensured that staff are clear about their duties and are held accountable for the impact of their work. Expectations of pupils' capabilities are high and targets are challenging. Teachers' classroom performance is now assessed directly in relation to the progress made by pupils.

There has been a seamless transition of leadership responsibilities to the new associate head teacher. She is ensuring that the progress already underway is being built on and sustained. This includes through an insightful and accurate analysis of the academy's performance so that priorities are securely focused on where improvement is most needed. Leadership in the Early Years Foundation Stage is being supported effectively by the executive early years leader from the trust. This includes the sharing of expertise and good practice from other academy schools.

Governors show a detailed understanding of the academy's performance and are keenly aware of the progress being made. The detailed reports they receive from the associate headteacher are helping to deepen their understanding of the work being done. They are fully aware of pupil premium expenditure and the performance of this group of pupils. As governors expand their direct involvement in the school, they are increasingly able to check on the accuracy of the headteacher's evaluations. Governing body meeting minutes show they are challenging and expectant about the academy's work. All safeguarding requirements are met.

External support

The support provided by trust has been central to the academy's improvement, particularly through the leadership of the acting chief executive. Effective input from other trust personnel has also been instrumental in supporting improvements, particularly in teaching and in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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

Tom Grieveson

Her Majesty's Inspector