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14 June 2013

Katy Peters
Principal
Battle Primary Academy
Cranbury Road
Reading
RG30 2TD

Dear Miss Peters

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Battle Primary Academy

Following my visit with Chris Nye, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 12 and 13 June 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, groups of pupils, parents and carers, staff, a member of the governing body and the director of the sponsors, National Education Trust (NET) Academies 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 is much larger than most primary schools, with 503 pupils on roll including 52 children who attend part time in the Nursery. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and supported by extra funding known as the pupil premium is above average. A high proportion of pupils are from a range of

ethnic minority groups and a much larger number of pupils than is usual are at an early stage of learning to speak English. The proportion of pupils on the school's register of special educational needs is below average, although the number with statements of special educational needs or who are supported at school action plus is average. Their needs relate mainly to moderate learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorder, and behaviour, emotional and social difficulties. More pupils than usual join the academy at different times during the year. The turnover of staff is high and the academy experiences difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers due to the predecessor school, Battle Primary School, having been in special measures on more than one occasion. The academy meets the government's floor standards which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Children's attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is exceptionally low, especially in communication and language. Children progress well in the Nursery, but only about half of them go on into the Reception classes. Children's progress in Reception classes has been too slow in the past. Improvements in the use of assessment to match activities more closely to children's needs are beginning to raise standards. By the time pupils join Key Stage 1 their attainment is now below, rather than well below, the expectations for their age.

Due to a high turnover of staff, pupils in Key Stage 1 do not make the progress expected and their attainment is well below average. Progress in reading, however, is improving significantly due to the systematic teaching of phonics (the sounds letters and combinations of letters make).

While the attainment of pupils in Key Stage 2 is also well below average, it is improving. Current pupils make better, although not yet consistent, progress across the key stage due to an increase in the proportion of good teaching. As a result of teachers' higher expectations, more pupils now reach the higher levels in their work. Pupils make better progress in reading and writing than in mathematics. They are beginning to read a wider range of texts. They produce more extended writing and their handwriting and spelling are improving well. Pupils take pride in the presentation of their work, as reflected in the good quality displays of their work around the school.

Through the introduction of more engaging curriculum topics and practical activities such as group discussion and problem solving, the academy is beginning to close the gaps in the achievement of boys, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals who are supported by the pupil premium funding, and pupils who speak English as an additional language. While pupils with statements of special educational needs progress as expected, the progress of other pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs lags too far behind. The academy is beginning to tackle this by training the teaching assistants to provide specific support to meet the pupils' varying needs.

The quality of teaching

The proportion of good teaching is increasing and inadequate teaching is being eliminated, particularly in English and at Key Stage 2 where standards are beginning to rise. Teaching is not yet consistently effective across all subjects and key stages. Teachers' subject knowledge has improved in English due to good quality staff training and support. Teachers' marking is improving and this, together with targets for literacy, is helping pupils to know how to improve their work. In all lessons, relationships between teachers and pupils are positive and encourage pupils to join in confidently. Key features of better taught lessons are teachers' high expectations, their modelling of the skills to be developed and clear lesson plans that involve a range of resources and activities to engage pupils in thinking and learning for themselves. The most important factor is the teacher's ability to constantly assess pupils' progress and to adapt the pace of learning, the activities and questions to match their different needs. This engages all pupils and maintains a good pace of learning for each of them. In particular, it is enabling more pupils to reach the higher levels.

In less successful lessons, the tasks and teachers' questions are not adapted to challenge the range of needs, so the pace of learning is slow, pupils lose interest and some of them cause low-level disruption. In these lessons, teaching assistants are often given too little direction to help disabled pupils and those with special educational needs to make sufficient progress. In most lessons, pupils are not assessing their own and each other's progress enough.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The academy has put in place a number of effective strategies to address previous weaknesses in behaviour. Consequently, behaviour, although improving rapidly, is not yet good. There is now a more calm and orderly environment for learning because staff are using school policies increasingly consistently. Pupils are keen to learn and they work well together in lessons that interest and engage them. However, incidents of low-level disruption in the lessons where teaching is less effective are still too common. Pupils are encouraged to walk sensibly around the school and to hold doors open for others. In the playground, pupils engage in more cooperative play because there is now more equipment, and staff and pupils have been trained as play leaders.

Through the curriculum, pupils develop very good understanding of all forms of bullying, including cyber bullying, and how to keep themselves safe. They say they are confident that staff would deal quickly with any concerns they raise. They also say that racist comments are rare and children from different backgrounds get on well together. This was seen to be the case. Pupils say they feel safe and well looked after in school, although some feel less safe around pupils with challenging behaviour. Members of staff manage the behaviour of these pupils effectively and well-maintained records indicate that incidents of poor behaviour and exclusions

have decreased significantly. The views of the small group of parents and carers who spoke with inspectors informally in the playground varied. Some felt behaviour had improved and others still had concerns about bullying, reflecting the inspectors' views that behaviour is not yet good. In spite of the academy's efforts to work with parents and carers, attendance remains well below average. Most pupils are punctual to school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The Principal and two assistant principals provide strong leadership and clear direction for improvement through clear action plans, policies and procedures, and through leading by example. They are supported currently by a seconded deputy principal until the end of the summer term. This effective senior leadership team is bringing about improvements in all aspects of the academy's work. However, there is not yet enough middle leadership capacity to help them to bring about improvements in teaching and learning and to raise standards more quickly. The assistant principals have responsibility for teaching full time in class as they provide the most effective teaching in the school. Their responsibilities for leading on English and mathematics will be given to the new middle leaders who have been appointed for the next academic year. A new special educational needs coordinator has also been appointed. The governing body and sponsors are aware of the need to appoint further high calibre teachers in order to release the assistant principals from some of their teaching commitment. This will help them to fulfil their leadership roles and to develop the leadership skills of the new middle leaders.

Through rigorous and accurate self-evaluation, including analysing information about pupils' progress, lesson observations, and examination of pupils' work and teachers' planning, senior leaders identify the most important areas for improvement, such as reading. The actions they take are beginning to raise standards. They do this through robust checking of the quality of teaching and setting clear targets for teachers, and through teachers' training and support. They are helped in this by the new system for checking pupils' progress. This helps them to hold teachers to account for the progress their pupils make and to identify appropriate support for identified groups of pupils.

The progress information also helps the governing body to hold senior leaders to account for the standards reached. The challenge and support provided by governors are leading to standards being improved, such as for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals who are supported by pupil premium funding. Governors ensure finances are used efficiently and effectively, for example they are currently reviewing the work of the teaching assistants in order to raise standards for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. They make sure statutory requirements are met. As a result, safeguarding procedures are robust and up to date. The breakfast club is well managed. The academy is developing ways of engaging parents and carers more in its work, such as through regular parental questionnaires and curriculum events. The more creative curriculum, for example a

visiting artist working with Year 6 pupils, makes a positive contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

External support

A range of effective external support has been provided by the sponsors, including in reorganising staffing, staff training, leadership coaching and visits to outstanding providers. The impact is evident in the improvements in the procedures for the recruitment and performance management of staff, self-evaluation, the environment for learning, and the curriculum.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise attainment, particularly in Key Stage 1, in mathematics and for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by:
 - making sure teachers constantly assess pupils' progress during lessons and adapt the pace, activities and questions to meet the needs of all pupils
 - engaging pupils in assessing their own work
 - making sure the best practice of engaging pupils in their learning is shared and eliminates instances of low-level disruption.
- Strengthen the capacity to improve standards more quickly by developing the skills of middle leaders in improving teaching and learning, and by recruiting further high-quality teachers.

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

Sue Frater
Her Majesty's Inspector