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Ellen Wallace
Executive Principal
Exeter - A Learning Community Academy
Brayford Avenue
Corby
NN18 8DL

Dear Mrs Wallace

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Exeter - A Learning Community Academy

Following my visit with Kevin Sheldrick, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 19–20 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 and Vice-Principal, senior and middle leaders, governors and pupils. All teachers were seen teaching, pupils were heard reading and a sample of written work from every class was scrutinised.

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 number of pupils attending the school is rising. Nearly half of the pupils are from minority ethnic heritages, and over a third speaks English as an additional language. Since the start of the school year 36 pupils have left the school and 38 are

new; some are newly arrived from abroad, particularly from countries in Eastern Europe. This high turnover is the equivalent of more than a whole class of pupils per year. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average, and a very few pupils have a statement specifying their special educational needs. Staffing is stable with all permanent staff returning in September.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Achievement is improving rapidly. Children in the nursery and Reception get off to a very strong start in their learning. From low starting points on entry, they are developing early reading, writing and number skills well. Their personal and physical development is particularly advanced.

Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are making at least expected progress. Standards are broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics, but not enough pupils who are capable of exceeding the levels expected nationally for their age are doing so. Pupils in Reception and Year 1 are making speedy progress in learning how to blend sounds for reading and break them down for spelling. The annual check of their knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) already shows that more than half the Year 1 pupils have reached the expected standard, even though some pupils' skills have not yet been checked.

Pupils are making at least expected progress in Years 3 and 6. This is more variable in Years 4 and 5. Attainment is improving but still below average. Accelerating pupils' progress in writing has been a whole-school push since the academy opened, and it is bearing fruit. Progress is less impressive in mathematics because the subject has not received as much attention. Pupils do not always have sufficient opportunities to practise and apply their mathematical skills in a range of contexts and subjects. The brightest mathematicians do not move on to challenging work quickly enough in lessons. The academy has identified that girls' numeracy skills are underdeveloped compared to those of boys.

The academy is making progress in narrowing gaps in achievement between different groups. Pupils who attend the 'nurture group' are rapidly and significantly improving their ability to regulate their own behaviour to an acceptable standard. This contributes to their better learning. It also helps others to learn in class because teaching is usually uninterrupted by inappropriate behaviour. Teachers are making adjustments in their teaching to cater more effectively for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, and pupils who speak English as an additional language. While this is helping them to make better progress in lessons, the support provided in groups beyond lessons varies in both quality and impact.

Pupils who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium receive a range of additional support to boost their learning in English. Some of this support has only been introduced recently and it is too early to evaluate its impact on pupils'

progress, but the school is considering the use of similar approaches to accelerate their learning in mathematics.

The quality and presentation of pupils' written work have improved in all year groups since January.

The quality of teaching

Since the academy opened, teaching has improved steadily. Inadequate teaching is now unusual. An increasing amount is consistently effective, and some aspects are occasionally exceptional in quality. Better teaching has been key in accelerating pupils' learning and progress, especially in reading and writing.

Throughout lessons, teachers check to see how well pupils are learning. Sometimes the work is not reshaped quickly when pupils have already learnt what was intended for them. Consequently, the challenge is not always high enough, particularly in mathematics and especially for the most able pupils. The disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are catered for appropriately. Teaching assistants and nurture staff play a valuable role in supporting these pupils and enabling them to play a full part in lessons.

The school has begun to closely track the achievement of pupils who are supported by pupil premium funding (those eligible for free school meals, looked after by the local authority, or from families with a parent in the armed forces). This group has access to specialist teaching of reading and speech and language to accelerate their learning and reduce the gap between their performance and that of their classmates. Some also receive help from specialist staff to better manage their feelings, emotions and behaviour.

All teachers make accurate assessments of the levels pupils are working at. In the nursery and Reception, staff keep meticulous records of young children's learning and use them adeptly to in planning experiences that meet their needs and draw upon their fascinations. That said, the experiences planned for children do not always progressively build up their skills, especially in terms of physical development. Further up the school, all teachers mark pupils' work thoroughly and regularly highlight what they have done well and what they need to do to improve further. Importantly, pupils are taking notice of their comments.

The quality of teachers' questioning is variable. Where teaching is strong, staff ask searching questions to deepen pupils' thinking and to draw out articulate answers. Teachers have limited access to high-quality up-to-date technology, so their use of it to engage learners or to illustrate key teaching points is restricted. Proficient teaching of reading, and particularly phonics, is resulting in rising standards in literacy. Staff are positive role models, and pupils respond readily to their high expectations for good behaviour.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is improving impressively. Year 6 pupils commented on how much the nurture group has helped individual pupils to manage their own behaviour and improve it. Pupils show respect towards familiar adults, visitors and each other. They are well mannered, and always quick to apologise if they should need correcting. At play pupils mix freely and generally get along well together. They use play equipment sensibly. In lessons, pupils are generally willing learners requiring few reminders to apply themselves to their work.

Poor attendance is a barrier to learning. It is improving, but not quickly enough. Year 6 pupils said that they would like to have more responsibility in making decisions through the school council, which has petered out since the academy opened.

Pupils are developing a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe from harm, especially in the nurture group, and who to go to should they have worries or concerns. They like to earn rewards by collecting 'treasure' such as glass nuggets.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The Executive Principal and Vice-Principal have been pivotal in advancing the academy's progress in raising standards. They have a realistic and accurate view of its work and do not accept any barriers as an excuse for underachievement. Time is invested wisely in training staff and looking after their well-being.

An effective leadership team is being shaped to share out the workload equitably and to build the academy's capacity to drive improvement with less reliance on the Principal and Vice-Principal. Key leaders – including governors – know that high-quality teaching and a curriculum that engages and inspires young learners are essential to effective learning. Pupils commented that the themes they are studying are much more interesting. Senior leaders address underperformance swiftly and with resolve. Teachers receive support that is tailored to their individual needs, with an expectation that improvements will follow quickly.

Middle leaders are extending the range of techniques they use for checking on standards in teaching and learning. This is helping them to pinpoint where improvements are needed. Staff morale is high and their confidence to share good practice is mounting. The stability of staff is testament to their commitment to Exeter, their confidence in leaders and managers, and their enjoyment in working at the academy.

The governing body is incomplete. Elections for parent governors are underway with promising interest from nine parents or carers for two vacancies. The governing body knows the academy well through first-hand evidence of its work. Governors are focused on raising achievement and check the progress made by all groups of pupils

regularly and rigorously. They do not hesitate to question and challenge school leaders if necessary. Equality of opportunity is central to the academy's ethos, and the governors insist that children's needs come first. However, developing positive and trusting relationships with parents and carers is also high on their agenda.

External support

The academy sensibly uses advice and support from a range of professional consultants to confirm the accuracy of leaders' judgements on its own performance. Work with its strategic partner academy has been central to the improvements made since it opened. The growing expertise of leaders and managers at Exeter is cultivating an exchange of ideas, knowledge and skills that is mutually beneficial to both academies in raising pupils' attainment.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve attendance rates to above national averages.
- Make teaching more consistently good or better, with more that is highly effective.
- Make sure that more pupils make good progress, especially in mathematics.
- Check that the experiences planned for nursery and Reception children always build on their previous skills and understanding.

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

Linda Killman
Her Majesty's Inspector