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Mr Benedick Ashmore-Short
Principal
Hamford Primary Academy
Elm Tree Avenue
Walton on the Naze
Essex
CO14 8TE

Dear Mr Ashmore-Short

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Hamford Primary Academy

Following my visit with Aileen King, Additional Inspector, to your academy on 20–21 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 teaching in 17 lessons. Four lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also observed small group sessions and an assembly, and listened to pupils read. The timing of the inspection meant that most of the Year 6 pupils were out of school on a residential visit. Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, a group of seven members of the governing body, representatives of the academy sponsor and groups of pupils, parents and carers, and teaching assistants. Inspectors also took into account the responses of 13 parents and carers to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and two letters from parents. Various academy documents were examined, along with a sample of pupils' work in English and mathematics.

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 opened in April 2012 following the closure of its predecessor, Hamford Primary School, which had been judged to require special measures. The acting headteacher of the predecessor school served as acting Principal for the academy's first term. You took up your post in September 2012, along with two other senior teachers. At this point the senior leadership team was restructured. Most of the staff from the predecessor school were appointed to the academy, but three teachers have since left for various reasons. Two more teachers are leaving in July and three new teachers take up their posts in September. This will mean that the deputy headteacher no longer has to teach a class.

The academy is slightly larger than the average primary school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs who are supported through school action is below average, as is the proportion supported through school action plus or a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is above the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding provided by the government to improve the progress of pupils who have ever been eligible for free school meals, those who belong to military service families, and those who are looked after by the local authority.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Pupils' progress in Key Stages 1 and 2 has improved since the academy opened, particularly in literacy. The standards attained by current Year 2 pupils are above average in reading and writing, and average in mathematics. For pupils in Year 6, attainment is broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. This represents good progress in reading and writing since Year 2, when their attainment was below average in literacy and average in mathematics.

Pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 have made faster progress since the academy opened and this has begun to make up for their previous underachievement. However, their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is still well below the standards expected for their age, with the gap averaging about half a year's work. Pupils' progress in mathematics in particular requires further improvement to ensure that pupils recall facts quickly, master basic techniques and develop their understanding of mathematical ideas. Pupils are gaining a better understanding of their work in other subjects because they spend more time working collaboratively and discussing ideas with each other.

Pupils are reading more keenly following a reorganisation of reading books by the new literacy coordinator. Their increased interest in reading has highlighted the shortage of suitable books in the library that support wider reading.

Summary assessments are accurate because the school moderates its judgements in collaboration with other schools. Assessment data is used to track pupils' progress and plan interventions for any at risk of underachievement. The school therefore has clear evidence that its use of the pupil-premium funding is accelerating the progress of the targeted pupils. One-to-one and small group tuition has helped most of these pupils to make very good progress this year.

The progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs varies according to the level of support they receive. Those with higher levels of need make similar progress to other pupils in the school, because the work they do in class is adapted to their needs and they are supported well by learning support assistants. Pupils with lower levels of need receive less support and their work is not adapted so well to meet their needs. As a result, many of these pupils are currently underachieving.

Pupils in the Reception class start school with skills that are, on average, lower than typically seen. This gap is still evident at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, affecting their literacy and numeracy and especially their understanding of the world. The gap is smaller in the creative and expressive arts.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved since the academy opened so that inadequate teaching has been eliminated. Recent lesson observations by the school, external consultants and during this inspection provide a consistent picture: teaching requires improvement in the majority of lessons, for a variety of reasons. The most common weaknesses are:

- teaching that is not adapted sufficiently to suit pupils' different starting points and learning needs, especially in literacy and topic work
- lessons that do not allow pupils enough time for sustained reading or writing, or to complete a wide enough variety of questions in mathematics to consolidate and deepen their understanding
- insufficient monitoring by teachers of pupils as they work, partly as a result of the previous two weaknesses, so that pupils' errors and misunderstandings are not identified quickly enough.

Where teachers do not monitor pupils closely enough, they are unable to adapt their teaching to overcome barriers to learning. They sometimes find it difficult to identify pupils who are going wrong but who think they are working correctly. This is because teachers' attention is demanded by pupils who do not know how to get started. Teaching assistants give appropriate support for small groups and individuals. However, they are not always given a productive role during whole-class sessions.

The strengths of teaching include good behaviour management and secure relationships among pupils and adults. Pupils know and follow classroom routines. Frequent use is made of visual aids to support learning in mathematics. Classrooms

have vibrant displays that include 'learning walls' where pupils can look for reminders about mathematics and literacy topics. School leaders have successfully promoted a whole-school focus on getting pupils to discuss ideas and work collaboratively in teams. However, too much time is sometimes spent organising these features leaving too little time for pupils to work individually.

Teachers' marking is of variable quality. Too often it does not identify the next steps that each pupil needs to take to improve their work or to progress their learning. Teachers' comments do not routinely require a response from pupils, whether this be correcting spellings or calculations or completing an additional task. School leaders are encouraging teachers to create opportunities for pupils to assess their own and each other's work, noting what went well and what could be done better. This encourages pupils to reflect on their own learning and strive for improvement. However, comments made by other pupils are not an adequate substitute for guidance by the teacher.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are cooperative, polite to adults and usually respectful towards each other. They behave well in lessons and around the school because their teachers have well-established classroom routines and a vigilant approach to behaviour management. Pupils respond promptly to instructions, requests and reminders. Their increasing pride in the school is a key factor in their positive attitudes to learning and the improving attendance rate. Pupils' social and moral development is promoted well through classroom expectations and by giving pupils roles of responsibility.

Parents and carers confirm that behaviour has improved since the academy opened. Those interviewed raised no major concerns about bullying or children's safety. Pupils understand safe and unsafe situations, including e-safety and cyber-bullying. They feel safe in school and well looked after, saying that the rare incidents of bullying are tackled effectively by staff. However, they are concerned that the school toilets are unwelcoming and too few to meet needs at break-time.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

You have had a galvanising effect on the school since taking up your post in September 2012. You have set out a vision that is shared by staff and the governing body for the school to become outstanding in the near future. Parents and carers speak highly of your approach to communication, which has transformed the quality of information that they receive. The improving outcomes for pupils show that the school leadership team has the capacity to secure improvements.

One of your first priorities was to eliminate inadequate teaching. This has been achieved by providing a mixture of whole-school training and tailored guidance for individual staff. Teachers now work in teams to plan work, so they can benefit from working with their more-experienced or more-effective colleagues. The school has adopted an approach to education that emphasises collaborative work in teams and

pupils learning to assess their own and each other's work. This has brought greater coherence to pupils' experiences as they move through the school.

Senior leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching and learning. They observe lessons, check pupils' work and analyse data on the progress of different groups of pupils. They hold regular meetings with each teacher to discuss the progress of each pupil and to plan any extra support they might need. These meetings have raised teachers' expectations and are helping raise overall achievement. However, they have not had enough impact on the progress of all pupils identified as having a disability or special educational needs.

The academy's rapid improvement plan is sensibly based on the areas for improvement identified in the final inspection of the predecessor school. The plan is reviewed every half-term and adapted where necessary, based on an evaluation by senior leaders of the impact of previous changes. Where necessary, new plans are devised or existing action is strengthened to achieve the desired impact. For example, with inadequate teaching now eliminated, professional development activities are being focused more on improving teaching to good. Senior leaders identify the strengths and weaknesses of teaching well. Their feedback to teachers is precise and constructive.

Much of the improvement to date has used broad strategies, such as the new approach to teaching. However, there are still issues of detail to be tackled. For example, work in mathematics is too episodic with topics changing too frequently. Pupils do not have enough time to master new ideas and techniques before they are moved on. In addition, pupils do not spend enough time within each lesson on independent work.

The curriculum planning for other subjects varies in quality and detail. Monitoring of subjects other than literacy and mathematics is less frequent and medium-term planning does not show clearly enough how individual lessons will add up to a coherent experience as pupils move through the school. Pupils learn about a range of cultures, traditions and beliefs but there is not enough emphasis on the diversity they can experience within the United Kingdom.

The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage currently lacks clarity but changes are planned for September. The outdoor area is under-developed and this contributes to children's limited understanding of the world around them.

Members of the governing body keep themselves informed about the work of the school. The governing body is well organised to ensure that different aspects of the school's work are monitored by dedicated committees. Governors challenge the senior leaders on their record, including their progress in implementing the improvement plan, and hold them to account well. They are conscious that the school buildings have a number of defects, such as the positioning of the only wheelchair-accessible toilet in one of the girls' toilets, and have plans to improve the

facilities over time. Arrangements for safeguarding children meet current requirements.

External support

The academy receives good support from its sponsor and from links with other academies in the Academies Enterprise Trust. This includes expert guidance from numeracy and literacy consultants, and challenge and support from the Trust's regional director and from the academy improvement officer. Collaboration with the nearby secondary academy provides opportunities for teachers to develop their expertise. The academy also benefits from links with an outstanding primary school which provides an 'improving teacher programme'. Smaller partnerships have also been developed with a number of other local schools.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that:
 - teaching is planned to cater for pupils' different starting points and learning needs, especially for pupils with special educational needs who do not have direct support from a learning support assistant
 - lessons include enough time for sustained reading and writing and, in mathematics, for pupils to consolidate and extend their understanding on each topic through independent work
 - teachers make time to monitor pupils as they work independently, so that they can adapt their lessons to overcome barriers to learning
 - in their marking, teachers identify errors, indicate how pupils can do better, set additional tasks to correct or improve the work, and check that these tasks have been completed successfully.
- Raise achievement in mathematics by ensuring that:
 - work on each topic builds over sequence of consecutive lessons so that pupils have time to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding
 - pupils meet a variety of questions on each topic that progressively provide more challenge to deepen their understanding.
- Increase children's understanding of the world in the Early Years Foundation Stage by improving the quality of outdoor 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

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector