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4 July 2013

Mrs J Morrell
Head of Academy
Strand Primary Academy
Strand Street
Grimsby
DN32 7BE

Dear Mrs Morrell

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Strand Primary Academy

Following my visit with Gina White Her Majesty's Inspector to your academy on 2 and 3 July 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 Head of Academy, the Executive Principal, staff, two members of the governing board including the Chair, pupils and a representative of the sponsor, Schools Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA).

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

Strand Primary Academy opened in October 2012. The academy provides education for pupils aged 3 to 11 and is smaller than most primary schools nationally. Fifty

nine per cent of the pupils, which is significantly higher than that seen nationally, are supported by the pupil premium, (additional government funding for children in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and those whose parents are serving in the armed forces). An above average proportion of pupils is supported at school action. The proportion of pupils supported by school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is above average.

The Head of Academy was an external appointment, the vice-principal held a post at the predecessor school. Since the academy opened there have been various staff changes. An Executive Principal supports leadership for three days a week. The Chair of the Governing Board was Chair at the predecessor school, other members are new appointments.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

A legacy of poor teaching over time means that by the end of Year 6, the progress made by all groups of pupils, although slightly improved, is not sufficient to raise standards in English and mathematics. Academy records show that standards in these important subjects are likely to be lower this year compared to the previous year. The quality of pupils' writing is weak and improving this is required urgently. Progress is apparent in mathematics, however, with more pupils reaching the higher Level 3 than previously. Across the academy, boys generally are doing better in mathematics than girls. This improvement is due to teachers having a better understanding of the gaps in pupils' mathematical knowledge and using this information to guide their lessons.

Teachers' assessments of pupils' work at the end of Year 2 show that more pupils than before are doing better in reading and mathematics. However, despite some modest improvement, standards and progress remain low in writing.

All children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, from a low base, have made progress this year in all areas of learning. Inspectors saw that classrooms have stimulating displays for language and mathematical awareness and these are used regularly in different situations to promote these important skills.

Pupils supported by the government's pupil premium funding are making better progress than their peers in Key Stage 2 and gaps are narrowing. This is because of the additional help they are receiving. This work is at an early stage, but it is having an impact, with the challenge for leaders to maintain this improvement. However, this situation is not apparent for younger pupils with pupils supported by pupil premium funding not doing as well as their peers. All pupils with special educational needs have additional help for reading, writing and mathematics. Academy data suggests that this work is beginning to have an effect, but the progress made by these pupils is very uneven.

The quality of teaching

During the monitoring inspection, senior leaders agreed with inspectors that the quality of teaching is variable across the academy and this contributes to the uneven progress made by all pupils. The strongest teaching ensures that teachers plan lessons carefully using the information available to them about pupils' abilities. They check regularly to make sure pupils understand what they are learning. Other characteristics of strong teaching include deploying additional adults properly, ensuring that teachers' model to their pupils how to improve their language, ensure that pupils write at length correctly and that lessons move at an appropriate pace.

However, these features are not common place and not enough lessons are planned well enough so that all groups receive work at the right level. In too many weaker lessons, some pupils do not make enough progress because teachers' expectations of pupils' capabilities are too low. Pupils get on with what they are asked to do but because they are unclear what they are learning in different lessons, completing their work is too often used as a measure of how well they have made progress. Consequently, more-able pupils do not reach their potential because teachers are not consistently planning or teaching lessons that stretch them.

Inspectors saw that pupils' literacy books are generally marked well with helpful comments. Generally, pupils are not given time to respond to teachers' comments and learn from their mistakes. Topic and science books are marked with comments that are brief. Too often grammar and spelling mistakes are ignored which contributes to an inconsistent approach throughout the academy to improving this important area.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

In and around the academy behaviour is calm and pupils told inspectors that it has improved recently. The well-established systems for rewards are being used more consistently within the academy which helps to encourage and develop pupils' more positive attitudes in class. Inspectors saw that in lessons, most pupils, even very young children, are engaged and they concentrate very well for extended periods. Pupils understand the consequences when they step out of line, especially when they don't listen to instructions. Staff know the pupils well and are supporting a small number of pupils who display challenging behaviour in lessons. Leaders have yet to analyse in detail whether this work is making a sustained difference to improving pupils' behaviour and attitudes.

The Head of Academy promotes a 'can do' culture and pupils realise what is possible and what they can achieve. Pupils say 'you have to try your best at all times' and they are very keen to do so. Since the academy opened, regular attendance is rewarded weekly and as a result the number of pupils who are attending every day has improved considerably.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Since the academy opened, there have been changes in leadership with a substantive Head of Academy in post from the start of the summer term. She is well supported on a part-time basis by the Executive Principal and together they have communicated their expectations for the academy. Staff told inspectors that they welcome clear direction and are starting to understand what is expected of them. Together, the Head of Academy and the Executive Principal, have, in a short time, worked hard to identify what needs to be done in order to raise standards and improve the quality of teaching. Regular monitoring of teaching and learning is undertaken with staff valuing the verbal feedback provided. However, written records of these visits are less detailed and do not identify trends of improvement or identify clearly where additional help is needed for all staff. This is because there is not enough focus on following things through to see if strategies are making a difference. Support staff are provided with feedback and training is given for them, again this is welcomed. This approach demonstrates the capacity of senior leaders to make a difference to the academy's effectiveness.

The academy development plan identifies where improvements are needed, but needs to be condensed so that the key priorities are measurable with progress checked at regular intervals to ensure that goals are being reached and if amendments are needed. Subject leaders are starting to be involved in work scrutiny and monitoring planning but securing rapid progress for all groups in mathematics and English is still in development.

Members of the governing board receive detailed information and are well aware of the challenges facing the academy. Improving the quality of teaching and the progress made by all pupils are their key priorities. Governors recognise that procedures for the performance-management for all staff need to be improved urgently so that they can check if the quality of teaching is improving and if all pupils are making appropriate progress. Regular visits and monitoring what is going on in the academy, enable governors to find out for themselves and thus hold leaders to account, question actions and ensure whether different activities and support are making a difference. At the time of the monitoring inspection all safeguarding procedures met requirements.

External support

Since the academy opened, the sponsor has enabled staff to visit other academies in the SPTA group and observe practice. These focused visits have helped staff to consider different resources, for example in mathematics, and to improve aspects of their teaching. Improvement in pupils' performance in mathematics is a clear indication of the impact of this work. Plans are in place for further visits and training to take place. Frequent visits and discussions between the sponsor and academy leaders enable information to be shared and priorities to be set. External consultants are working with the academy. However, a lack of measurable goals to measure the

impact of their work within a particular timescale limits leaders' awareness of the value of their work.

Priorities for further improvement

- Use information from all lesson observations, work analysis and drop-ins to inform additional help and training for all staff to raise the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good throughout the academy.
- Monitor the quality of teachers' planning in all subjects to ensure that all pupils are challenged appropriately and that learning is at the heart of all lessons.
- Ensure that all intervention work, either internal or external, is measurable and has the desired impact on the progress made by pupils.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education the Chair of the Governing Board and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Marianne Young

Her Majesty's Inspector