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Mrs V Bragg
Executive Headteacher
Whitemoor Academy
Whitemoor
St Austell
PL26 7XQ

Dear Mrs Bragg

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Whitemoor Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 16 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, pupils and the Chair of Governors to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The academy action plan was evaluated. We jointly observed three lessons and a group session on phonics (the linking of letters and the sounds they make). I heard a few pupils reading and examined a range of documents including information on pupils' progress and teachers' performance management.

Context

Three weeks prior to the section 5 inspection, you were appointed Executive Headteacher of the school for five terms. You work part-time at the school and are supported by a recently appointed Head of Learning. In May, the academy became part of The Cornwall Academy Trust. In September 2013 the number on roll is likely to increase to 99 pupils and there are plans to expand to four classes.

Main findings

The action plan provides clear direction for governors and staff in tackling the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 inspection. In addition to outlining what action will be taken, it provides details of how this will be done. You are rightly focusing on improving the quality of teaching through coaching and mentoring staff. Teachers are visiting your substantive school and academies in the Trust to see outstanding practice. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is beginning to improve, although it still requires improvement.

Staff morale is improving as teachers and teaching assistants are motivated by the opportunities for professional development. This includes recent training in the teaching of phonics. The phonics session observed engaged the pupils. The boys who were heard reading used a range of strategies, including phonics, and talked enthusiastically about the books they had read in the scheme you have introduced to widen their reading. This is an improvement since the section 5 inspection.

Teachers are engaging pupils more in lessons by talking less and providing activities that involve pupils in working independently and with others. For example, in the lessons we observed, Reception and Year 1 pupils were challenging each other to set out a sum of money using different combinations of coins, Year 2 and 3 pupils were finding shapes with right angles, and pupils in the Year 4, 5 and 6 class were planning stories in groups. The teachers were beginning to set different expectations of pupils, according to their differing stages of learning. However, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, and pupils with low or high prior attainment were not challenged enough to make good progress.

Early scrutiny of the recent national tests indicate that pupils' attainment at level 4 and above in both reading and mathematics is broadly in line with national expectations, but fewer pupils than nationally reach the higher level 5. Pupils' attainment in writing is below national expectation, especially for those with low prior attainment. Pupils are making inadequate progress in writing because teachers' marking contains few comments to help them to know what to do to reach the next level. Handwriting is often not joined and pupils do not take enough pride in the presentation of their work. While some teachers accurately assess the levels of pupils' work, others do not because they are not familiar with the criteria for the levels.

Teachers are not setting work at the right level for all pupils. Targets are not included in the academy's current system for tracking pupils' progress. This means that expectations are not consistently high for all pupils and pupils do not know what they are expected to work towards. In addition, teachers' performance management does not focus on measurable targets for improving pupils' achievement.

A thorough external review of governance was undertaken by The Cornwall Academy Trust. As a result, roles and responsibilities are clear. Governors have yet to receive training to help them understand the information on pupils' attainment and progress in order to hold the academy to account for the standards it reaches.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- improve teachers' use of assessment and targets to promote consistently good progress for all pupils across all subjects, and especially in writing.
- provide further training for governors to help them understand the information on pupils' attainment and progress and to know what questions to ask when holding the school to account.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The academy is drawing upon external support provided by the Cornwall Academy Trust appropriately, particularly in the temporary appointment of the Executive Headteacher. This is providing clear leadership and direction for improvement, as seen in the improvements in reading. The academy now needs to draw on the best practice within the Trust to develop its use of assessment and targets.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the local authority for Cornwall, and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater
Her Majesty's Inspector