

PROTECT-INSPECTION



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12 July 2013

Naomi Shrimpton
Acting Principal
Oasis Academy Blakenhale Infants
Blakenhale Road
Birmingham
B33 0XD

Dear Mrs Shrimpton

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Oasis Academy Blakenhale Infants

Following my visit with Sandra Hayes, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 10–11 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 you, other senior teachers, the Chair of the Academy Council who is also the academy's regional director, and representatives of the sponsors. They met with a group of pupils, heard pupils read and spoke with pupils in lessons and during break times. All the observations of teaching and learning were carried out together with you and the Chair of the Academy Council. In addition to lesson observations, inspectors reviewed pupils' writing, mathematics and topic books. They also met with and looked at the work of some pupils who need extra help.

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

Oasis Academy Blakenhale Infants opened in February 2013. It is sponsored by Oasis Community Learning, which is a multi-academy sponsor. The academy is

larger than most primary academies. There are currently 324 pupils on roll. The large majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The remainder are from a range of minority ethnic groups, including Pakistani, and White and Black Caribbean. A below-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils identified as having special educational needs is higher than average. The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium (which provides additional funding for pupils in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals) is above average.

All staff transferred from the predecessor school to the academy. Since this time, there have been a number of changes in staffing. The Principal, two teachers and the teacher with responsibility for pupils who need extra help are leaving at the end of this term. The Principal has been absent due to ill health since June. At the same time, you took on the role of Acting Principal. Four new teachers have been appointed. Two of these are on permanent contracts and two on temporary. All five teachers will join the school in September. Next term, two existing members of staff will become members of the senior leadership team. One will be responsible for leading developments in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the other for literacy.

A new model of governance was introduced in February 2013. Governors from the two predecessor schools, Blakenhale Infants and Blakenhale Junior, were brought together to form an Academy Council. Members of the council are responsible for checking the difference senior leaders are making to pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. The Academies Executive provides a strategic lead in the academy.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making faster progress. They join the Nursery with skills and abilities that are below those expected for their age, especially in speaking, writing and number, and they make good progress. This is because their activities are well matched to their learning needs.

Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are rising in Key Stage 1. Academy records indicate that a higher proportion of pupils are working at the standards expected for their age. Rates of progress are improving, but are uneven because of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. In most of the lessons observed in Years 1 and 2, pupils made at least expected progress. In a few lessons in these year groups, pupils made insufficient progress.

The progress made by different groups of pupils is getting better but remains variable. More-able pupils and those who need extra help do not always make enough progress. This is because their work is not always hard enough. Academy leaders have correctly identified that further work is required to help pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding to make faster progress.

More frequent opportunities for pupils to write at length are helping pupils to practise and develop their punctuation, spelling and grammar skills. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are developing well because some teachers are encouraging them to use a wide range of vocabulary during discussions and when answering questions. A stronger focus on the sounds that letters make (phonics) is helping pupils to read more difficult words. However, not all adults tell pupils how they can work out the meanings of these more difficult words. Teachers have benefited from recent training provided by a mathematics consultant. As a result, pupils in most classes are increasingly being given the chance to use their knowledge of number to solve complex mathematical problems.

The quality of teaching

There is some effective teaching, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage. In Years 1 and 2 teaching is improving but it is not consistently good or better. Some inadequate teaching remains in these two year groups.

In the most effective lessons, pupils of different abilities made good progress because work was well matched to their abilities. Pupils completed a substantial amount of work during these lessons because teachers and teaching assistants ensured pupils remained focused. They also provided pupils with swift and effective support. In one example, a group of pupils in Year 1 thoroughly enjoyed following a set of written instructions to make cupcakes. Some of the words on the instruction sheet were unfamiliar to the pupils. They successfully used their phonics knowledge to read them. Throughout the process, they checked with each other that they had worked out the meanings of these unfamiliar words, were following the instructions correctly and selecting the right ingredients. The adult working with this group pushed the learning along with helpful questions.

In the lessons where pupils made expected instead of good progress, pupils did not have sufficient time to complete their work. This was because the teachers spent too long explaining activities. More-able pupils and those who needed extra help did not always make rapid progress because they were not moved on to learn new skills during the lesson. In a few lessons in Years 1 and 2, pupils made inadequate progress because their activities were either too difficult or too easy. Pupils were also confused about their activity because the teacher did not explain clearly what they were expected to learn.

Teachers' marking has improved. Teachers acknowledge what pupils have achieved and identify accurately what pupils need to do to improve their work. However, throughout the school, pupils are not always given the time to respond to these comments and correct their work. Occasionally, pupils who struggle with their reading cannot act upon the advice their teachers have given them because they cannot read the comments.

In the Nursery and Reception classes, children learn to be independent and creative, and work well with others. This is because teachers plan activities which successfully promote these skills. There are suitable opportunities for children to practise their

speaking and listening, and reading and writing, throughout the day. In contrast, children do not always have enough chances to develop their number skills. You have identified the need to further develop the playground outside the Early Years Foundation Stage so that children learn a wider range of skills in the outdoors.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are polite and welcoming. However, their behaviour requires improvement. In lessons, pupils' behaviour is directly influenced by the quality of teaching. Where teaching is not good, pupils tend to be unresponsive. This is because teachers do not always encourage them to develop the skills required to work well on their own and with others. Noise levels in a few classes are too high. This makes it difficult for pupils to concentrate while they work. In contrast, behaviour is good when teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and plan activities which inspire them. This was the case in one Reception class. The children took turns, listened carefully and worked together effectively while exploring pictures of different types of bears and creating their own 'bear collage'.

The behaviour of the majority of pupils around school is good. In the playground, pupils enjoy using the wide range of playground equipment and take care of each other. They told inspectors that they appreciate the work of the peer mediators, who encourage them to play together well. Pupils say that, occasionally, a few pupils 'play fight', but such incidents are dealt with quickly by staff. Academy records show that the few incidents of bullying have been dealt with effectively; a view shared by pupils, who spoke informally with inspectors. Pupils feel safe and have a good understanding of how to stay safe. Attendance is just below the national average but improving.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The academy's own monitoring of teaching shows that, in the spring term, the quality of teaching was not improving quickly enough. In response to this, members of the Academies Executive took appropriate and decisive action to tackle the weaknesses in teaching and provide staff with the necessary support. Staff have benefited from a suitable range of training. This is contributing to recent improvements in the quality of teaching and rates of progress for pupils. You have rightly organised further training to help teachers better meet the needs of more-able pupils, those who need extra help and those that are eligible for pupil premium funding.

Appropriate action has been taken to ensure that, from September 2013, the distribution of responsibilities is more evenly spread between senior teachers. The teachers, who will be responsible for leading developments in the Early Years Foundation Stage and literacy, are keen to work with you and lead improvements. Nevertheless, there is a long way to go before they have all the skills required to monitor rigorously the work of staff and to secure rapid improvements in pupils' progress. Despite this situation, and with strong support from the academy sponsors, you are bringing about the necessary improvements.

In a short space of time, you have gained an accurate understanding of the academy's strengths and most pressing priorities. You are regularly checking the work of staff and the progress of different groups of pupils. Your feedback to staff following lesson observations is helpful, and accurately identifies what teachers need to do to help all pupils make faster progress.

You are working with the Chair of the Academy Council to revise the academy's improvement plan. The intention is to produce a termly plan which accurately reflects the recent findings from monitoring undertaken by you and the Academy Council that has challenging learning targets for different groups of pupils, and that clearly specifies how success will be measured.

The Chair of the Academy Council, who has experience of leading a school, is providing you with an appropriate level of support during the absence of the Principal. For instance, he has helped you to prioritise the actions needed to raise pupils' achievement, and to organise relevant training for staff. Members of the council are visiting the academy regularly and checking how well pupils are learning. This is helping them to gain a secure and accurate understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. They are asking you and other teachers searching questions about pupils' progress.

Teachers are getting better at giving pupils the chance to practise their reading, writing and mathematics in different subjects, and making sure that activities capture pupils' imagination. Pupils told inspectors that, when they are going to start a new topic, they enjoy the 'sparkling starters' because they make learning fun. Pupils in Year 1, for instance, visited a fire station prior to starting their work on the local community. Similarly, children in Reception went on a 'bear hunt' around the school before starting their topic about bears. A review of pupils' topic books shows that teachers do not give pupils the chance to regularly record what they are learning in a wide range of subjects, thereby reducing the opportunities they have to practise their writing skills.

External support

During the absence of the Principal, the Chair of the Academy Council has increased the frequency of his visits. You and other senior leaders appreciate the support and challenge he and the academy sponsors provide. They have organised relevant advice and training for staff. The recent training on mathematics and questioning, for instance, is having a beneficial impact on the quality of teaching. You have valued the support the Principal of Oasis Academy Blakenhale Junior has provided with the appointment of new staff. The academy's national director and the Chair of the Academy Council have appropriate plans in place to provide other senior leaders with the training and support they will need.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of teaching in Years 1 and 2 so that it is consistently good and better by making sure that all teachers:
 - plan activities which effectively meet the needs of pupils of different abilities, and especially for the more-able and those who need extra help
 - move pupils on to learn new skills more quickly during lessons
 - give pupils frequent opportunities to develop the skills required to work well on their own and with others.

- Further strengthen leadership and management by:
 - securing long-term arrangements for the leadership of the academy
 - ensuring that all senior leaders have the skills required to monitor rigorously the work of staff and are able to secure rapid improvements in pupils' progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Usha Devi
Her Majesty's Inspector