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Mrs Yvonne Buckley
Headteacher
Willow Primary School
Alston Road
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN4 7EZ

Dear Mrs Buckley

Special measures monitoring inspection of Willow Primary School

Following my visit to your academy on 17 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in April 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection I held meetings with you, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and a member of the trust associated with the academy. I also met with the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. The academy's statement of action and action plan were evaluated. You accompanied me on a tour of the academy during which we made a series of brief visits to lessons.

Context

Currently, there are four teachers on long term leave of absence. Three classes are being taught by temporary staff. Since the previous inspection, the academy has arranged for support from the local authority.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since the April inspection you, senior leaders and members of the governing body are beginning to come to terms with the scale of the task ahead. However, this has been a slow process and leaders have not tackled improvements to teaching with enough urgency. Inadequate teaching has been challenged firmly but teaching requiring improvement has not been confronted with the same rigour.

Teachers have made a concerted effort to improve the displays in classrooms and use them

to enhance pupils' learning. They have also worked hard to help pupils improve the presentation of their work. In each class there are displays that remind pupils about using their best handwriting and tips on how to check their work. This is beginning to have an impact and pupils are taking more care with their presentation.

Leaders have used the information from parental questionnaires to make it easier for parents to talk to teachers. For example, teachers in Key Stage 2 now come out on to the playground at the end of the day so that parents can speak to them informally.

The academy's statement of action and action plan are focused on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The action plan picks out the things the academy needs to do and the timescales for checking on progress. Although it meets requirements, there are weaknesses. For example, it is not precise enough about what governors and external partners will look for when they are checking on the work of the academy. Some parts of the academy's action plan are unrealistic, especially around the improvement of teaching, because the details of how improvements will be brought about are too vague.

The headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, form an improvement group. This group meets every two weeks to check on the progress the academy is making. However, the effectiveness of this group is limited because there is no contribution from an external partner to give an objective point of view. The academy is exploring using the services from a number of different sources but it is not clear enough how the work will fit together or how the academy will know if it is effective. During the inspection, we discussed my strong recommendation that the academy secures an external partner, such as the local authority, to join the improvement group. You acted quickly on this and the local authority responded with equal alacrity.

Members of the governing body are reflective and understand there is much they must do to improve their work. They have worked with an experienced leader to review the quality of their work and are determined to act on the recommendations. The Chair of the Governing Body has improved his understanding of what to look for in test results by attending some recent training. There is still some work to be done to ensure other governors develop their skills in understanding what test results mean for different groups of pupils.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The academy's statement of action and action plan are fit for purpose. Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint NQTs.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Doncaster and the DFE Academies Advisers unit. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joan Hewitt
Her Majesty's Inspector