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8 November 2013

Mrs Sue Frost
Acting Principal
Maple Court Primary Academy
Beverley Drive
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST2 0QD

Dear Mrs Frost

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Maple Court Primary Academy, Stoke-On-Trent

Following my visit to your academy on 7 November 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 July 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- give more precise guidance to teachers on how to improve and set short timescales for these to be achieved.
- ensure all given next steps are followed up within the agreed timescale.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, members of the governing body, the executive Principal and a representative of the sponsor to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. Telephone conversations were held with the local leader in education whose school is providing support to the academy and the educational welfare officer brought in by the academy for one day per week. The academy development plan was evaluated. Other documents were examined: the school's checks on the quality of teaching and learning; information about pupils' current achievement; records of behaviour and attendance and information about the training given to teachers. Short visits were made to lessons to talk with pupils and look at their learning.

Context

Since the inspection the headteacher retired and you became acting Principal. An executive Principal oversees the four academies within the College Academies Trust. Additional governors have been appointed. The leadership team has been restructured and an inclusion manager has taken up her appointment. Governors commissioned a local leader of education (LLE), who is the headteacher of a local school, to work in partnership with you and provide training and coaching for teachers to help improve the quality of teaching.

Main findings

You, your senior leaders, the executive Principal, governors and the academy sponsor have responded to the inspection findings with a sense of urgency. There is a commitment to improve rapidly, but also to ensure that improvements will be sustained, leading to better outcomes for all pupils.

The academy development plan sets a clear direction for these intended improvements. It includes helpful success measures, set out over two years, that will support governors and the trust to evaluate progress made. The planned actions are appropriate to the academy's priorities and are scheduled over a realistic timescale. The plan indicates that progress checks will be made every six weeks. Governors plan to increase the frequency of these checks to ensure improvement happens quickly enough.

Teachers say the support from the partner school is helping them to improve. The programme is in its early stages. You report the training has increased some teachers' confidence in managing behaviour and that the level of challenge for some pupils has risen. You have set clear expectations for marking work. Marking now usually shows pupils a next step. This guidance is not precisely matched to pupils' needs and pupils rarely have the opportunity to put these suggestions into practice so they do not make the expected improvement.

A programme of training to increase teachers' skills in teaching mathematics is about to begin. Teachers now follow the agreed approach to teaching number facts more confidently and consistently. Teachers place greater emphasis on teaching pupils to set out their work, so the number of worksheets used has reduced. Nevertheless, too many remain in some classes. In the books seen, there were examples of pupils using mathematical skills to solve problems or to help them in other subjects. This is still not happening frequently enough, so pupils' progress in mathematics is slowed.

You and other leaders regularly check the quality of teaching by observing lessons, looking at pupils' work and analysing information about pupils' achievement. Following these checks, you give teachers guidance on how to improve. Some of this guidance is too broad and sometimes teachers have too many areas to focus on at a time. Currently you do not set dates by which you expect teachers to make improvements. As a result, teachers do not always clearly know what they need to do to improve and you cannot hold them to account for the pace of change.

The re-structure of the leadership team has provided a much greater focus on management of behaviour. You have commissioned the services of a specialist consultancy to teach pupils in one year group how to manage their own behaviour. Behaviour records show a reduction in the number and severity of incidents. There are still inconsistencies in the way behaviour is managed by different staff because there is not an agreed strategic approach. Consequently, some disruptions still occur. The education welfare officer has established various means to engage parents in discussions about attendance. She is developing a system to intervene with concerns at an early stage. Attendance has recently improved a little, although it is still low.

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 has been judicious in commissioning support. Governors have an accurate view of what is needed. They seek to support you in keeping the level of support manageable, yet effective. The sponsor is realistic about which types of support are best provided from within the trust and what needs to come from external agencies. Governors and the trust board regularly review the impact of support through a focus on pupil achievement.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Stoke-on-Trent.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes