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22 November 2013

Mrs J Szymonowicz and Mrs S Rowe
Interim Executive Headteachers
Epworth Primary Academy
Birchfield Road
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN9 1DL

Dear Mrs Szymonowicz and Mrs Rowe

Special measures monitoring inspection of Epworth Primary Academy

Following my visit with Keith Bardon, additional inspector, to your school on 20 and 21 November 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The sponsor's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Isle Education Trust Board and the Director for People for North Lincolnshire.

Yours sincerely

Angela Headon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2013

- Improve teaching so all is at least good so that all pupils, including lower-attaining pupils, pupils with special educational needs and those supported through the pupil premium, make at least good progress, by:
 - making sure teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - making sure that teachers provide practical and interesting activities that appeal to all pupils, but especially the lower-attaining boys in order that they remain interested and involved
 - providing pupils who need additional help with their learning with the right and timely support they need to make good progress in every class
 - supporting teachers to assess pupils' achievements accurately and use information about what pupils know already to plan work for them that is at the right level
 - making sure that teachers' marking identifies clearly what pupils have done well and what they need to do to improve their work, and that pupils are given the time to respond to this marking so that improvements can be made.

- Raise the attainment of all pupils in reading so that a greater proportion reach and exceed the nationally expected levels by:
 - ensuring that pupils who have weak basic skills have the support they need to catch up quickly
 - making sure that pupils improve their spelling, particularly in Key Stage 2
 - ensuring that all pupils, but particularly the lower-attaining, read more regularly.

- Ensure that senior leaders and governors make urgent and rapid improvements by:
 - improving the provision which the school makes for pupils with special educational needs and those supported through the pupil premium by making sure their needs are identified quickly and their progress is checked regularly so that they do not fall behind
 - taking swift action to deal with inadequate teaching
 - making rigorous checks on teachers' planning and the progress being made by pupils in every class
 - involving subject leaders regularly in checking that actions are leading to consistently good teaching
 - ensuring that assessment information is accurate
 - ensuring that all staff with leadership responsibilities have the skills they need to accurately check the impact of the actions being taken
 - making sure that the governing body has a full picture and clear understanding of the school's performance and that they use this to hold senior leaders fully to account for their work.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 20 to 21 November 2013.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised a range of documents and met with the interim executive headteachers, the Principal designate, senior leaders, teachers, support staff, pupils, the Chair and members of the Isle Education Trust Board, including the Principal of South Axholme Academy, and a senior representative from the local authority.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, a new Principal has been appointed to start in January 2014. Four teachers, including two senior leaders, joined the academy in September. Currently, two classes are taught by supply teachers, including one part-time arrangement. The academy is now part of a multi-academy trust. The Isle Partnership Trust also includes South Axholme Academy. This arrangement has been operational since October 2013. The previous governing body has been dissolved and academy governance now lies with the Isle Education Trust Board.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Improvements are evident in the academy's unvalidated 2013 national test results. However, the picture of inconsistency remains. Results for Year 6 pupils improved in reading and mathematics, but declined in these aspects for Year 2 pupils. Conversely, attainment in writing improved at the end of Key Stage 1 but remained broadly static at the end of Key Stage 2. As a result, reading and mathematics results are above average at the end of Key Stage 2 and below average in writing.

Similarly, progress measures show a mixed picture, with much better progress evident in reading. However, although some improvement is evident in mathematics and writing, due to the previous legacy of underachievement, performance overall remained below the expected floor standard.

Pupils' current progress, however, as indicated in lessons and the academy's assessment data shows an improving and more positive picture. Accelerated progress is evident, particularly for older pupils and those in Key Stage 1. Due to a range of strategies to improve reading, including a full review of 'guided reading' and the active promotion of shared reading in class and at home, pupils' performance in reading across the school is continuing to improve. Children's development in the Early Years Foundation Stage is secure, with good provision evident.

Key groups of pupils, particularly those with additional learning needs, are also making better progress than seen previously, with examples of significant progress for a number of individual pupils in reading. However, there remains a more variable picture of progress between those supported by the pupil premium funding and their peers. Academy leaders recognise the need to continue to focus sharply on key groups to ensure consistent improvement across the academy, particularly in writing.

A comprehensive tracking system, regular pupil progress meetings and moderation of pupils' work and a full review of provision for those pupils with additional learning needs are already helping to ensure that any underperformance is swiftly addressed.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved since the inspection in February 2013. Academy leaders rigorously monitor the work of teachers and teaching assistants and, as a result, they have an accurate view of the quality of provision across the academy. Nearly all teaching observed during the inspection was good, with no inadequate provision evident.

Key aspects in those lessons where pupils made good gains in their learning included: high teacher expectations; activities well matched to pupils' ability levels; effective whole-class and individual questioning to check pupils' understanding and challenge their thinking; and good use of assessment information, including success criteria and targets, to motivate and encourage pupils to improve continually. Effective teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants was also a key feature in ensuring pupils were able to make consistent progress.

However, where opportunities were missed in lessons to allow pupils to reflect, discuss and fully develop their understanding and ideas, pupils made more-limited gains in their learning.

Academy leaders recognise the need to ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently good in order to tackle the legacy of variable performance, particularly for key groups of pupils. Consequently, teachers' performance, including their classroom practice, planning and marking are frequently checked and reviewed. Teachers and teaching assistants value the quality of individual feedback and the well-targeted whole-academy training available to help them to develop their practice further.

The quality of teachers' lesson planning and workbook marking reflects the overall picture of improvement. Planning includes well-targeted activities for groups and individuals, and developmental comments in workbooks are used consistently to develop the quality of pupils' work further. Pupils have regular opportunities to respond and improve and indicate that they value teachers' comments.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the academy during social times. Very positive relationships are evident between pupils and adults, and in lessons pupils have good attitudes to learning and are eager to do well.

In discussion, pupils confirm that they feel safe in the academy and understand the behaviour system, including the rewards available for good behaviour and achievement. They also recognise the importance of good attendance and punctuality.

Leaders have taken a robust approach to reducing pupil absence, particularly due to families taking extended periods of leave, notably holidays, during the academic year. The learning mentor has also continued to work effectively with those families whose children have a track record of poor attendance and punctuality. Consequently, pupils' attendance has improved since the previous inspection and is currently above the national average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The leadership of the interim executive headteachers has been pivotal in driving forward the academy's improvement agenda at pace. In this, they have been well supported by staff, the local authority and more recently, the academy sponsors and governing board. There is now a strong sense of teamwork and shared commitment to build on the academy's emerging developments.

The academy's robust system of regularly monitoring and evaluating all aspects of provision, together with the regular review of pupils' achievement has already resulted in measurable improvements in teaching and key aspects of the curriculum, notably reading. This work is, in turn, linked directly to the key priorities in the academy's development plan, which is now fit for purpose. Systems to manage staff performance are also now in place with individual targets linked directly to the school's key priority areas.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the staffing structure has been revised and new senior leaders have been appointed to support the work of the interim executive headteachers further. Their work has included monitoring teachers' planning and pupils' workbooks within their area of responsibility and leading aspects of staff training. They are now working closely with the interim executive headteachers and Principal designate to review curriculum changes in English and mathematics, and the quality of provision for pupils with additional learning needs. The leadership of subjects other than English and mathematics is at a very early stage of development.

Following the dissolution of the previous governing body, the Isle Education Trust Board, in a very short space of time, has established structures to monitor the academy's work. These include regular visits by board members and further plans to introduce an advisory forum that will report directly to the governing board. The board has also started to re-establish and improve links with parents. Meetings with board members, a recent parent survey and the election of a Parent Director have ensured that parents and carers have had a range of opportunities to share their views on the work of the academy.

External support

The support of the local authority is valued and well regarded by both academy leaders and the sponsors. The local authority has worked productively with the multi-academy trust to ensure an effective transition to sponsored academy status. Key aspects of the local authority's work include: brokering the academy's current leadership arrangements; enabling the principal designate, currently working with the local authority, to work part time at the academy to support transition; regular 'progress team' meetings; and funded improvement visits, including consultant training. Support for provision in physical education has been provided by South Axholme Academy.

The sponsor has worked swiftly to establish the new academy structure and governance arrangements. However, due to the limited timescale, a revised statement of action was not available at the time of the inspection. The sponsor recognises the need to ensure that this document meets requirements before the next monitoring inspection.