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17 December 2013

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

Dear Mrs Bragg

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Whitemoor Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 16 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 second 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.

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 the progress of all pupils, including the low achieving and most able, and those with special educational needs or who are supported by the pupil premium, by:
 - helping teachers to check their progress during the lesson and to adapt activities, the pace and their questions to make sure they all make good progress
 - developing their skills in handwriting and spelling
 - challenging those in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1 to work independently, for example in solving mathematical problems or in writing.
- sustain, and increase the pace of, improvements by reviewing and developing leadership roles and responsibilities across the school.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the teachers, pupils, and the Chair of Governors designate to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. We jointly observed four lessons covering all the teachers. In addition, I examined key documents including a review of the Ofsted action plan and the academy's monitoring of the progress of current pupils.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection most of the governors, including the Chair of Governors, have left. A new Chair of Governors has been appointed to the academy's local governing body. An additional class has been formed and a new class teacher is in post. This has reduced the age range in each class from three to two year groups.

Main findings

The quality of teaching is improving due to the executive headteacher's clear expectations of lesson planning and the assessment and marking of pupils' work. Teachers are now making use of their assessments to plan lessons that better match the learning needs of all pupils. For example, they are setting clear expectations for different groups, including the least and most able pupils. They are preparing activities and resources to suit the pupils' differing levels of learning, and making good use of teaching assistants to support low achieving pupils and those with special educational needs. When marking work, teachers write comments to help the pupils to know how to improve it. However, teachers are not yet checking progress during the lesson and adapting activities, the pace and their questions to maintain a good level of progress for all pupils. Consequently, progress for different groups of pupils is uneven, including for those who are supported by the pupil premium.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are improving as a result of the improvements in teaching and in the range of resources, including ipads and reading books. Pupils often help each other by suggesting how they can improve their work. They also make good use of classroom displays, such as the literacy and numeracy 'working walls'. Displays of pupils' work are improving in quality and create a much more positive working environment in the school. Pupils in Key Stage 1 and children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, however, are not challenged enough to develop the resilience to work independently, for example in solving mathematical problems for themselves or writing in role play areas, such as listing the toys they pack into Santa's toy sacks.

Weaknesses in handwriting and spelling remain barriers to learning and progress across the school. Nevertheless, the school's tracking of pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics, is beginning to show signs of improvement in these areas, especially for older pupils. Teachers' assessments are becoming more accurate. This

is as a result of teachers working with other schools to check that the levels awarded are appropriate and consistent.

The executive headteacher has introduced clear policies and procedures for lesson planning, assessment and marking across the school. She has made sure that the system for tracking pupils' progress is accurate and used to identify any underachieving pupils for intervention programmes. She has also introduced new procedures for managing behaviour which are being implemented consistently by all staff. The procedures are having a positive effect on pupils' behaviour. As a result of these clear expectations and of teachers' recent professional development, including visits to successful schools, staff morale is rising. The executive headteacher has rightly identified the need now to review subject and other leadership roles and responsibilities across the school in order to sustain, and increase the pace of, improvements.

The recently appointed Chair of Governors has experience of being a Vice Chair and Chair of Governors in local primary and secondary schools. He is well aware of his role in holding the academy to account for the standards it reaches and in liaising between the Cornwall Academy Trust, pupils, staff and community. He already has a good understanding of the academy's strengths and areas for improvement through meetings with the executive headteacher and her regular review of the Ofsted action plan. The plan focuses appropriately on improving the areas identified in the section 5 inspection, including improving the impact of governance and managing the performance of staff.

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

External support

The academy is making effective use of the training provided by the Cornwall Academy Trust and of visits to see good practice in the schools within the Trust, to develop teachers' skills. The Trust is strengthening leadership, including governance, through the appointment of the new Chair of Governors and the temporary appointment of the executive headteacher. It now needs to support them in reviewing and developing the leadership roles and responsibilities across the school to sustain, and increase the pace of, improvements.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cornwall local authority.

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater
Her Majesty's Inspector