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Mr Raja Ali
Headteacher
Heron Park Primary Academy
Dallington Road
Hampden Park
Eastbourne
BN22 9EE

Dear Mr Ali

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Heron Park Primary Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 12 September 2014, 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 first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 2014. 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:

- add more regular milestones that relate to pupil outcomes to the academy improvement plan
- sharpen evaluations of the impact of interventions for pupils, in particular for those eligible for the pupil premium
- increase rates of progress for pupils across the academy so that more reach age related expectations.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, the executive headteacher and your deputy headteacher to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met with your middle leaders, the chair of the Local Academy Board and the chief executive from Aurora Academy Trust. We visited classrooms, during which I spoke to some pupils and looked at some work in books. As well as analysing information about pupils' outcomes, I evaluated the academy improvement action plans.

Main findings

Under your strong leadership, with effective support from the executive headteacher and deputy headteacher, the academy has come out of a long period of instability and is now well placed to improve. You have ensured that all classes now have a regular teacher and that weaker teaching is being tackled. Since the last inspection you have worked to increase leadership capacity at all levels. Middle leaders are now much more accountable for monitoring and improving teaching.

Your school improvement plan clearly shows how you intend to improve the academy further and includes appropriate success criteria relating to pupil outcomes to measure its success. However, these milestones, being annual, are too infrequent. It is crucial that more frequent milestones are added to ensure you can amend your plans in a timely manner should they not continue to drive improvement.

You are beginning to make much better use of information about the progress of pupils to decide where you need to focus the school's efforts. You are clear that the achievement of pupils at the academy remains too low. However, you are not yet using this information to evaluate and improve the impact of interventions on individuals and groups of pupils. This is particularly important because of the large number of pupils you have who are eligible for pupil premium support.

With support from the academy trust you have successfully reorganised the local academy board and have recruited new members with appropriate experience and expertise. This has already raised the board's capacity to hold academy leaders to account. All members helpfully oversee specific areas of the academy's work. Minutes from their meetings demonstrate that they are now giving much greater challenge to academy leaders.

As we saw during our visits to classrooms, teaching is showing signs of improvement. Expectations across the academy are rising and pupils are responding well. We saw several lessons where work had been carefully tailored to the needs of pupils, because teachers are now making better use of information about what pupils know and what they need to do next. Teachers are also beginning to make better use of questioning to deepen and challenge pupils' thinking. For example in a

Year 5 mathematics lesson, the teacher encouraged the pupils to think carefully and logically by asking: 'What do you think logically would go there?' and 'How would you know if you were right?'

Pupils' achievement is starting to improve, but not as quickly as it needs to, and there is still more work to be done before teaching is likely to be judged as good. Some teaching seen was not up to your high expectations. The marking policy is being consistently used by teachers, but does not always help pupils to improve their work. There was evidence that some pupils are now getting opportunities to write for extended periods, but this remains inconsistent, along with the quality of teaching overall.

As we discussed, pupils behave well at the academy and demonstrate good attitudes to their learning. Systems to encourage good behaviour are successful and pupils speak positively about how staff deal with issues when they arise. Safeguarding arrangements are robust.

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 Aurora Academy Trust has provided strong guidance and support for the academy since the previous inspection. Academy leaders have made good use of this, for example through the use of collaborative action research projects to improve teaching. The trust has also been instrumental in reorganising the local academy board so that it is aligned with stronger practise elsewhere in the trust.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex and the Academies Advisors Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes

Seconded Inspector