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Gemma Down
Acting Headteacher
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Rough Hay Road
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Wednesbury
WS10 8NQ

Dear Ms Down

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Rough Hay Primary School

Following my visit to your academy on 15 December 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 September 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the academy 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:

- further strengthen procedures for the management of the performance of staff, including for teaching assistants
- ensure that governors are systematically involved in ensuring that pay progression is linked to achievement of performance targets
- sharpen the evaluation of the impact of spending of pupil premium funding to ensure that all actions help to surmount barriers to learning and provide value for money

- accelerate the progress of more able pupils to ensure that more pupils reach the higher levels of attainment at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2
- develop further the reading culture of the academy, including by diversifying the book stock and strengthening the role of the library
- improve the quality of work in pupils' books in subjects beyond English and mathematics, ensuring that pupils have high quality opportunities to develop and apply literacy and mathematical skills across all subjects
- ensure that the academy's website is upgraded to meet statutory requirements.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the acting headteacher and acting executive headteacher, other senior leaders, pupils, and representatives of The Elliot Foundation Academy Trust to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The academy improvement plan was evaluated. I visited lessons briefly with the acting headteacher and looked at pupils' books on a tour of the academy. I spoke to staff and pupils during lunchtime play activities. Documentation was scrutinised, including records of the outcomes of monitoring activities and performance management arrangements.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, the academy has formed a close working relationship with King's Rise Academy, an outstanding school in Birmingham which is also part of The Elliott Foundation Academies Trust. The current acting headteacher was vice-principal at King's Rise. The principal of King's Rise is now acting executive headteacher across three academies: King's Rise, Rough Hay and its federated partner The Croft Academy in Walsall. Governors and staff are being consulted on proposals to make these acting arrangements permanent in a formal federation. The substantive deputy headteacher is on long-term sickness leave.

Main findings

The link with King's Rise Academy has substantially strengthened the effectiveness of Rough Hay's leadership and management and its capacity to improve. Teachers and leaders have a good deal of confidence in the acting headteachers, because they have brought clarity to job roles and to expectations both for teachers' effectiveness and pupils' progress. Leaders, staff and pupils now share a vision for improvement centred on a mutual understanding of what makes good academic progress and on developing an ethos of respect and good behaviour.

The new academy behaviour policy, introduced in November, is widely credited by staff and pupils with transforming pupils' behaviour in class, and in moderating excessive boisterousness in playgrounds and corridors. During this visit, pupils were purposefully focused on learning in class, including during lengthy paired discussions. They said that incidents of poor behaviour during lunch and breaktimes have reduced considerably.

Leaders have focused strongly on ensuring that teachers understand and can use the academy's new assessment system. Teachers' assessments have been extensively moderated to validate their accuracy. Assessment is now being used effectively by teachers to plan schemes and lessons that ensure pupils are beginning to make accelerated progress. Assessment results suggest that, while achievement is generally rising, still too few pupils are on course to reach the highest levels of attainment by the end of each Key Stage, so more needs to be done to accelerate progress for the more able. Teachers' marking in English and mathematics is now generally very effective in showing pupils how to improve, getting them to make improvements and, where appropriate, setting them higher-level 'challenge' tasks to extend their learning. This quality is yet to be matched in books in other subjects, where currently too few opportunities are taken to reinforce and develop literacy and mathematical skills.

While phonics test scores compare well with the national averages and suggest that younger pupils have a sound technical ability to read, there is not a well-established culture of reading in the academy, so that not all pupils read regularly for pleasure. The library is not currently conducive to stimulating a wide interest in reading.

Governors and the academy sponsor commissioned a review of pupil premium as required by the inspection report. The review went well beyond the effectiveness of pupil premium funding to consider many aspects of leadership and management of the academy. The review was rigorous and searching, and produced very clear recommendations for strengthening the scrutiny and oversight of academy performance by governors and the sponsor, to avoid further decline. The report highlighted fundamental shortcomings in the academy's monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of pupil premium spending. Initial steps have now been taken to gather information about outcomes for pupils eligible for additional funding to allow sharper evaluation of impact.

The academy development plan is well-focused on actions to address the main issues of the Section 5 inspection; it is regularly reviewed and offers a generally good framework for driving improvement. The performance management of teachers has been strengthened very considerably by setting out clear expectations for pupil progress, teaching quality and professional development. While performance management for teaching assistants and support staff is identified as a priority in the development plan, there are few specific details for implementation in this area of key importance. There is also still no clearly defined procedure in place

for governors to systematically check whether pay awards for leaders and staff are justified by their performance. The governing body has taken a more active role in monitoring the academy's work, through the academy improvement committee and visits to the academy, although governing body minutes still show little detailed challenge or questioning of academy performance. The academy's website does not at present meet statutory requirements, although the academy's new leaders are actively commissioning the necessary improvements.

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 Elliot Foundation Academy Trust has successfully brokered effective leadership support for the academy from within its own family of schools. It has ensured that the academy is now receiving regular progress partner visits to check on key aspects of improvement. Its commissioning of a thorough external review of the academy's leadership has provided a clear agenda for improvement, in leadership operations within the academy and in roles and responsibilities of leaders, governors and sponsor.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector