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14 February 2015

Mr P Barnett / Mrs B Townend
Headteacher
Park Junior Academy
Medley Street
Castleford
West Yorkshire
WF10 4BB

Dear Mr Barnett / Mrs Townend

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Park Junior Academy, Wakefield

Following my visit to your academy on 13 February 2015, 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 October 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, 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:

- develop the teaching and leadership of mathematics across the academy so that teachers provide work that carefully builds on what pupils understand and pupils are set work that enables them to reason mathematically and apply what they have learned in different ways
- ensure that the checks leaders make focus clearly on evaluating the impact of initiatives and the difference they are making to pupils' outcomes
- make sure that where issues are identified leaders follow these up to bring about improvement

- sharpen the school's improvement plan to set out clearly how leaders will bring about improvements and outline milestones and criteria to enable governors to hold leaders to account more effectively.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you both, together with your deputy headteacher. I also held meetings with two members of the governing body and two representatives of the academy sponsor to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school development plan was evaluated. You both accompanied me on a tour of the school and we visited classrooms to look at pupils' learning. A small selection of pupils' books were scrutinised to look at improvements in mathematics along with a range of documents including records of the school's monitoring activities and minutes of governing body meetings.

Context

Since the inspection one new teacher has joined the academy. Two classes are currently being taught by supply teachers.

Main findings

Leaders, governors and academy sponsors all agree that the 'requires improvement' judgment recognised the drive and commitment to improvement of the relatively new senior leadership team. Governors have an honest and accurate evaluation of the academy's strengths and weaknesses and have completed a review of governance at the academy and set out actions to improve this in an action plan. They are taking steps to find out for themselves how the academy is improving by interviewing staff and pupils. However, this activity is not linked with the academy's improvement plan. This is because the current plan does not set out clearly enough what successful improvement will look like at different points on the academy's journey to good. Similarly, the plan does not link the criteria for measuring success to the actions leaders are proposing to take. As a result, although the plan addresses the right areas for improvement, the extent to which the plan is a useful tool for holding leaders to account is limited.

Indications from the academy's internal assessment information show more pupils are on track to achieve expected levels at the end of Year 6 and the rates of progress they are making are beginning to improve. However, this is still not consistent across all year groups. This is because the impact of the quality of teaching on pupils' learning varies across the academy. Leaders have checked various aspects of the academy's work to see if it is improving. However, more rapid progress is currently hampered because leaders do not focus enough on evaluating the impact initiatives are having. Furthermore, where issues are identified, action to insist these are addressed is not always timely enough.

The academy has worked with Glasshoughton Infant Academy to support teachers in improving pupils' understanding of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) this is beginning to have an impact on pupils' outcomes in reading. However, work to improve teaching and pupils' outcomes in mathematics has stalled. Efforts to broker support from specialist teachers have yet to bear fruit. Work in pupils' books shows there is much to do to improve teachers' expertise in developing pupils' mathematical reasoning and giving them opportunities to think deeply and apply what they have learned to different, open-ended problems.

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 sponsor has a clear and accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses at the academy. Support from Glasshoughton Infant academy has been effective in driving improvements and supporting senior leaders. However, improvements in teaching and learning in mathematics have not received sufficient external support and consequently are not progressing as quickly as the academy would like.

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

Yours sincerely

Adrian Guy

Her Majesty's Inspector