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5 March 2015

Bhupinder Kondal
Principal
Oldknow Academy
Oldknow Road
Small Heath
Birmingham
B10 0HU

Dear Mrs Kondal

Special measures monitoring inspection of Oldknow Academy

Following my visit with Rachel Howie, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 3–4 March 2015, 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place April 2014. 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.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers, subject to prior consultation with Her Majesty's Inspector.

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 Trustees, the Academies Advisers Unit and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Jane Millward
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc. Chair of the Governing Body
cc. Local authority
cc. The Secretary of State

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in April 2014

- As a matter of urgency, ensure a full review of governance with a particular focus on the suitability of those acting as governors.
- Review the financial probity at the academy and employment procedures.
- Secure stability in the leadership of the academy.
- Improve the quality of education by ensuring that a broad and balanced curriculum, including religious education, equips pupils to live and work in a multi-cultural, multi-faith and democratic Britain and to develop tolerance towards peoples of all faiths and all cultures.
- Safeguard students better by:
 - improving staff and governors' understanding of, and commitment to, their responsibilities for keeping pupils safe
 - ensuring that staff and governors undertake extensive training in how to identify risk to pupils from extreme or radical views
 - ensuring any plans to alter the ethos, culture and values of the academy are widely consulted on and better understood.
- Improve communication with parents so that they understand why decisions are made in the academy.
- Ensure that all staff are consulted about aspects of academy life and proposed changes.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 3–4 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, the associate principal, senior leaders, groups of pupils, representatives from the governing body, and representatives from the board of trustees. Her Majesty's Inspectors observed parts of lessons and scrutinised a range of documents, including action plans, information about progress made by pupils, minutes of governing body meetings, attendance and exclusion records, 51 staff questionnaires, and records showing how the academy cares for its students and keeps them safe.

Context

Since the last inspection, one class teacher has left the academy and four further staff have resigned. Five new appointments have been made, including one teacher and four members of support staff. Two parent governors have been elected onto the governing body. Two additional trustees have joined the board of trustees and one trustee has resigned. The trustees continue to work with the Department of Education and the Ark Trust towards the new academy status.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils are continuing to attain well in reading and mathematics. Writing has, quite rightly, been identified by leaders as a relative weakness. Due to a concerted effort on improving writing, data held by the academy indicates that standards in writing are predicted to increase this year. This is because pupils are making better progress in lessons. However, it is expected that Year 6 results, will remain below the national average.

Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are making the progress expected of them. This is because pupils' individual learning needs are being more accurately identified and appropriate support put in place. Most pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium funding (additional funding provided by the government for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those in public care) make at least as much progress and, in some cases, more progress than their peers.

Improved tracking procedures have enabled leaders to monitor progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils. This shows that the most-able pupils are making better progress. However, this remains inconsistent across the academy. Not all Black African pupils are making the progress they should, and boys achieve less well than girls.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is still effective overall. This is because staff are responding well to regular training and coaching. However, some temporary staff remain at the academy and leaders struggle to appoint high-quality permanent members of staff. Parents who spoke to inspectors raised concerns about the high number of temporary teachers working in the academy. Temporary teachers have equal access to support and development along with permanent members of staff. As a result, temporary teachers are not having a detrimental effect on teaching.

When teaching is effective, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and they ensure pupils move on with their learning quickly. Pupils have positive attitudes in lessons and are keen to learn. Teachers plan lessons that build effectively on pupils' prior learning, and teachers use questions well to develop pupils' understanding.

When teaching is less effective, teachers do not match learning to the individual capabilities of all pupils and teachers do not have high enough aspirations for pupils. Teachers rely too much on textbooks and do not take into account what pupils already know. However, when leaders identify weak practice, a support package is put in place to support the teacher to improve.

The marking of pupils' work is still too variable. Although some marking carefully guides pupils on how to improve, there is some work that remains unmarked. Some teachers ask pupils to respond to their marking, but the pupils' response is often disregarded.

Teachers do not routinely rectify pupils' basic spelling mistakes; for example, spelling of the months of the year. This does not help pupils to quickly improve their literacy skills.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Generally, pupils are polite and well mannered. Parents and pupils agree that the academy is a safe place for pupils to learn and play. Pupils told Her Majesty's Inspectors that incidents of bullying are rare and are quickly tackled. The relationships between pupils are good, and the academy is calm and well ordered. However, one third of staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire do not believe behaviour of pupils is well managed. Recent developments to how behaviour is managed are robust.

Meticulous records are maintained for vulnerable pupils. Any concerns raised about individual pupils are dealt with swiftly, and the academy works well with outside agencies. If pupils leave the academy and their destination is unknown, staff follow robust procedures to inform the local authority in order to track the location of these pupils. However, the academy raised concerns that these referrals to the local

authority are not acted upon quickly enough and the academy receives little information about what has been done to ensure that missing pupils are safe.

Checks are routinely made on the suitability of staff, and leaders carefully consider specific aspects of safeguarding appropriate to the academy. For example, staff receive regular training and updates on keeping pupils safe from the potential dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Pupils' attendance is above the national average. Any absence is followed up appropriately.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders have developed systems and procedures across the academy that are having a positive impact. For example, procedures to monitor how well pupils achieve have developed and, as a result, leaders are now better able to hold staff to account for pupils' progress.

Leaders now have job descriptions, resulting in a greater clarity about their roles and responsibilities. Through their regular meetings, senior leaders have reviewed the academy's improvement plan. However, the plan does not show what leaders will improve between now and the end of the summer term, leading to a lack of accountability.

Senior leaders have accurately evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of individual teachers. Using these evaluations, they have been able to plan a programme of support and training tailored to the specific needs of staff. This is improving the quality of the teaching.

Two parent governors have been appointed and one governor vacancy remains. Not all governors fully accept the findings of the inspection in April 2014. Consequently, these governors are potentially less able to provide appropriate support and challenge. The board of trustees remain on the governing body, providing an expert steer for less-experienced governors. The number of trustees has increased to strengthen leadership and management and to provide direction for the future of the academy. Two new members, only very recently appointed, are representatives from the Ark Trust.

A temporary arrangement is currently in place where leadership roles and responsibilities are shared between the principal and associate principal. This has led to confusion and a lack of clarity about who is accountable for the work within the academy. As a result, some critical work has been overlooked. For example, the academy's improvement plan does not include any work to improve communication with parents. Some parents voiced concerns about the quality of communication. Even though the academy's website has been improved, with a dedicated section for parents, there remain concerns about how future developments of the academy are communicated.

Staff are not united as a team and staff morale is low. Nearly half the staff who responded to the staff questionnaire feel the academy is not well led and managed. There remains a lack of trust, and some staff still feel fearful to express their opinions.

Improvements to the curriculum have been maintained. Topics taught are based on pupils' interests and are adapted to suit the needs of the learners. The quality of pupils' topic work has improved since the last inspection visit. Pupils now have more opportunities to apply their writing skills across a range of subjects but more work is needed to provide similar opportunities to improve their mathematical skills. Opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of British values have been planned into the curriculum. For example, in Year 5, pupils have investigated how governments are formed, how elections take place and how to develop a political manifesto. Assemblies make a positive contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. For example, pupils have learnt about how to resist peer pressure, make wise choices and how Christians observe Lent.

External support

Trustees have brokered support to bring consultants from a local national support school into the academy. The consultants are working effectively by providing sound, sensible and robust advice. For example, the newly appointed special educational needs leader is benefiting from regular support from an experienced leader who has helped reorganise the special educational needs department in the academy. The Department for Education has supported the board of trustees to find solutions to the issues around recruitment of suitable staff. This has had limited impact, as leaders report it is difficult to find appropriate staff to join the academy.