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Mr David Walsh
The Minerva Academy
157 Edgware Road
London
W2 2HR

Dear Mr Walsh,

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Minerva Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 20 March 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 second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the responsible sponsor are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure subjects other than English and mathematics are delivered in sufficient depth for pupils to make consistently good progress
- further develop the skills of subject leaders so that they are able to drive improvement in their areas of responsibility.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the Executive Headteacher and the Head of School, a group of pupils, the Chair of the local governing body and members of staff, including teachers and support staff. A discussion was held with a local authority officer prior to the inspection. The school improvement plan and other documents were evaluated. Each class was jointly visited with the head of school.

During visits to classrooms a range of pupils' workbooks were scrutinised from across the curriculum.

Context

At the time of the last monitoring inspection the school's sponsor was in advanced negotiations with the Department for Education about securing a new sponsor. On 1 September 2015 REAch 2 Academy Trust took over the sponsorship and governance of this school. The school changed its name from CET Westminster to the Minerva Academy. The local governing body was replaced with a temporary local transition board. The transition board will be replaced by a local governing body later this year. The previous Executive Headteacher left the school at the end of the summer term and was replaced in September 2015 with a new Executive Headteacher from REAch 2. The deputy headteacher was promoted to the head of school.

One teacher has left the school since the previous inspection and three unqualified training teachers have left having been re-deployed elsewhere within the REAch 2 trust. One teacher is leaving the school at the end of this term. An Assistant Headteacher is joining the school at the beginning of next term.

The school will move to a new purpose built school building at Paddington Basin in 2017.

Main findings

At the start of the academic year, the academy trust acted quickly to review how effective the school was in its work with pupils and parents. They identified where the school was in its journey towards becoming a good school and in tackling the areas that required improvement in January 2014. This work ensured that the trust, the local transition board, leaders and staff have a sharp understanding of where the school is and what is necessary to improve the school. All staff have been involved in creating an improvement plan which is driving improvements quickly, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. The plan is more sharply focused than at the time of the last monitoring inspection in May 2015. The plan now has clear milestones, so that progress can be tracked by leaders and governors. Leaders acknowledge the plan needs to still identify how aspects that are behind schedule will be brought back on track rapidly.

Since September, leaders have checked the quality of teaching regularly. These checks draw upon a range of evidence, including lesson observations, reviews of pupils' work and scrutiny of pupil achievement information. Clear feedback is given to teachers and support staff which helps them to improve their work and their impact on pupils' learning. Leaders have created with staff a clear vision of what they want learning to be like; senior leaders describe this as, '...using London as our classroom'. Pupils now frequently visit a London landmark as part of their learning. For example, recent visits have included, The Saatchi gallery, a chocolate factory,

Hyde Park and the Natural History Museum. Pupils say these visits inspire their writing in class, and help in their wider learning. This could be seen in their highly articulate explanations of amphibians, when talking about their visit to the Natural History Museum.

Presentation and handwriting are now given a high priority by staff. The comparison between pupils' books from last academic year and this year is striking. Work is now neatly presented and the handwriting of individual pupils shows improvement over time. The quality of teachers' feedback to pupils is also improving. Pupils are now given regular feedback which they use to improve the quality of their work. In English feedback focuses on improving spelling and giving advice on developing pupils' writing skills. In mathematics, most teachers expect pupils to practise identified misconceptions to progress their learning.

Senior leaders have focused quickly on eradicating any inadequate teaching. This has been achieved and pupils across the school are making faster progress, as a result. Leaders are aware that inconsistencies remain. Subject leaders are increasingly taking the mantle of leading their areas of responsibility. They are enthusiastic and committed in supporting the school to improve. However, leaders recognise that this layer of leadership is still at a very early stage of development. Subject leaders have yet to begin evaluating the impact of their work and are still too dependent on senior leaders to drive improvements in their areas of responsibility.

Reading, writing and mathematics have rightly been the central focus of the school's improvement work thus far. Leaders have ensured that these key skills are being used well across all subjects. However, although teaching in English and mathematics has improved, leaders have not ensured that learning and skills in other subjects are taught consistently well, so pupils make consistently good progress. For example, leaders acknowledge pupils do not currently learn practical science skills regularly in order to develop their skills and understanding rapidly.

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 REAch 2 trust has provided the school with extensive challenge and support. They have supported the school in re-deploying surplus staff within their group of schools. Support functions, such as finance and personnel have been led by the new sponsor to ensure that leaders have been able to concentrate on securing the necessary improvements in teaching and learning. Support for newly qualified teachers has been strong. Minerva has linked with other schools in the REAch 2 trust and this has supported leaders effectively in driving areas for improvement identified at the January 2014 inspection.

The school has welcomed the opportunity to work with the local authority. Local authority officers have been proactive in offering support and challenge to leaders. This partnership has ensured that the school is well placed to deal with safeguarding issues and that staff understand their responsibilities in preventing exploitation.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Academy Advisers Unit at the Department for Education and the Director of Children's Services for Westminster.

Yours sincerely

David Storrie
Her Majesty's Inspector