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27 April 2015

Ellen Wallace (Executive Principal)
Exeter - A Learning Community Academy
Brayford Avenue
Corby
NN18 8DL

Dear Ms Wallace

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Exeter - A Learning Community Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 24 April 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 November 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the 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:

- Enable all pupils to develop their ICT skills through regular and productive use of the new ICT facilities, supported by fully trained staff.
- Continue the improvements in the quality of extended writing by ensuring the consistency of the use of the marking policy in all classes.
- Ensure that the external review of governance takes place as a matter of urgency.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the acting headteacher, the subject co-ordinators for reading, writing and phonics and the special educational needs co-ordinator, a representative of the trust, and the Chair of Governors to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I looked at a range of documents including the school development plan, records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning, a sample of exercise books and minutes of meetings of the governing body. I accompanied you and the acting headteacher on a tour of the academy to see the learning that was taking place. I held informal conversations with a few pupils when I visited classrooms with you.

Context

There have been several changes to your teaching staff since the last inspection. For various reasons you have appointed new teachers to several year groups. You have also appointed four new members of the support staff.

Main findings

You have amended and supplemented the school development plan so that it accurately reflects the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report. The plan shows that you have evaluated progress on the completion of actions every term. You use relevant success criteria to help you with this. You recognise correctly that the success criteria lack sufficient, quantifiable detail that would allow more precise monitoring of progress and improvement, over more frequent and regular timescales. You also acknowledge that exact individual responsibilities for monitoring are unclear in places and that the role of governors in monitoring is not explicit. There is no indication that the plan is updated if an action has not been completed. You have started revision of the development plan to address these points.

You have responded promptly to the last inspection with a significant investment in resources and training. You have established a well-planned training programme. This has been effective so that all staff are clear on the areas for improvement. In particular, your subject co-ordinators demonstrate high expectations for the quality of teaching in the areas for which they are responsible. This means that they have an accurate view of where additional support for teachers is needed. There are clear examples of where teachers have responded to the helpful feedback they have received from subject co-ordinators and senior leaders. This has led to improvements in their teaching, for example, in the use of questioning to develop pupils' thinking skills.

Senior leaders and subject co-ordinators have clear and high expectations for the quality of marking and feedback, as set out in the marking policy. There are examples of good practice when teachers focus closely on improvements to spelling, punctuation and grammar. Pupils increasingly respond to written feedback in order to correct their work. There is some inconsistency in the quality of marking within and between year groups. Subject co-ordinators are aware of this and have appropriate plans in place to improve the quality of marking further.

You have developed a number of successful initiatives to increase the opportunities for extended writing across the academy. This includes the use of topic areas for

each year group. Pupils enjoy practical and creative work that clearly stimulates their imagination and gives real-life examples to inspire pieces of extended writing. You have given careful consideration to activities and themes that will interest boys and girls alike and this is working well. Pupils use topic books to complete pieces of extended writing in different subjects. While there is no immediate evidence of pupils completing pieces of extended writing more often, the quality of extended writing has improved. This is especially the case when pupils' work is supported by regular and more detailed marking.

The senior leaders have promptly made the improvements needed in the quality of teaching of ICT and the resources to support this. You have set up ICT suites in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 and ensure specialist ICT teaching for all pupils. The acting headteacher has overseen the writing of the computing curriculum, which provides good opportunities for pupils to use ICT skills creatively. You have plans in place for all teachers to receive training before the end of this school year so that these facilities are used to their full potential.

The governing body has responded to the last inspection report with commitment and ambition. Governors promptly organized training in key areas for improvement identified in the last report, specifically concerning decisions about the allocation of funding. As a consequence, they have an accurate understanding of the use of pupil premium and the sports premium and the positive difference this has made to pupils. The Chair of Governors has found it helpful to carry out a skills audit and to use this to identify further areas in which governors need to develop their expertise. Minutes of the meetings of the governing body show that governors have increased the depth and frequency of the questions they ask the senior leaders. The Chair of Governors recognizes rightly that further training is necessary to enable governors to become less dependent on the senior team and the trust, and to be in a more informed position to support and challenge as appropriate. The external review of governance has not taken place and this should be arranged as a matter of urgency.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Your academy receives good support through the academy trust, for example, in moderation and quality assurance work. A representative of the trust has provided timely and helpful training for the governing body pending the completion of the external review. You ensure that your staff benefit from a range of professional development opportunities through their work with the Corby Learning Network of Schools. The academy benefits from the acting headteacher's leadership and hosting of the termly mathematics and ICT meetings of this network. His work has been highly valuable in developing the mathematics and ICT curriculum across the academy. Subject co-ordinators have developed their leadership skills through their work with the Brooke Weston Teaching School Alliance.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire and as below.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Carter-Fraser
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- For academies [CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk]