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18 June 2015

Ms Jane Cartlidge
Headteacher
Southfield Primary Academy
Banbury Road
Brackley
NN13 6AU

Dear Ms Cartlidge

Special measures monitoring inspection of Southfield Primary Academy

Following my visit with Vanessa Love, Additional Inspector to your academy on 16–17 June 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 academy’s previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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 strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint NQTs.

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children’s Services for Northamptonshire and as below.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority
- The Secretary of State
- For academies [CausingConcern.ACADEMYS@education.gsi.gov.uk]
- The lead and team inspectors

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2015

- Improve teaching to good by:
 - ensuring that tasks match the learning needs of pupils more accurately, including those of the most-able, disabled pupils, and those who have special educational needs
 - raising teachers' expectations of the quality of pupils' work and their progress
 - increasing the provision for computing to benefit pupils' learning
 - making better use of questions to probe pupils' understanding and to extend their learning.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - developing the roles of senior and middle leaders so that they are more effective in identifying and targeting areas for improvement in teaching and learning, and acting upon these
 - developing the knowledge and skills of governors, so that they sufficiently hold the academy to account
 - improving the leadership and provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.

- Improve pupils' achievement by:
 - ensuring that the most capable pupils reach higher standards in reading and writing
 - accelerating the progress of pupils who are disabled and who have special educational needs
 - meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils more effectively so that the gap between their achievement and others closes in the academy.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 16-17 June 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, groups of teachers, including middle leaders and teaching assistants. Meetings were held with the academy business manager, and two governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. I spoke, by telephone, with an independent education consultant who is working with the academy. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including information provided by the academy on pupils' current achievement, the most recent self-evaluation document, and the external reviews of governance and the academy's use of the pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils. They also observed learning in visits to lessons in all classes, accompanied by senior leaders, other than a Year 4 class as these pupils were on a residential visit.

Context

Since the first monitoring visit, the assistant headteacher has left the academy. Further redundancies have been confirmed with effect from September 2015.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Results from national assessments at the end of Key Stage 1 show significant improvements in attainment compared to last year. The results, moderated through a local cluster of nine schools, show that attainment in reading has improved strongly with more pupils attaining the higher levels than before. All pupils on roll since the start of Key Stage 1 met or exceeded their targets in reading. Attainment in writing also improved and again, more pupils attained the higher levels than last year. Attainment in mathematics was similar to last year, though all of the higher ability pupils attained Level 3. The large majority of pupils met their targets in reading, writing and mathematics. This includes disabled pupils' and those who have special educational needs and the small number of disadvantaged pupils.

Pupils in Year 1 are making more rapid progress than before and the provisional results for the recent screening check of phonics (letters and the sounds they make), almost all pupils met the expected standard.

Teacher assessments in Year 6 show some improvements in attainment compared to last year, though these are not consistent across all subjects. Improvements are seen particularly in pupils' achievement in English grammar, punctuation and spelling and their attainment is rising in reading. More pupils than before have been entered for the higher papers in national assessments in mathematics this year.

Achievement in other year groups remains too variable. The school's assessment data continue to show that pupils in Year 3 and Year 5 are not achieving well enough.

The quality of teaching

The proportion of good teaching is beginning to improve. Stronger teaching and increased curriculum time for English and mathematics are beginning to see some improvements in attainment. However, not all teaching has improved quickly enough to remedy past underachievement and there remains too much variation in teaching, including in the same year groups. This explains why pupils' progress remains variable across the academy.

In the more effective lessons, pupils learn at a good pace and are challenged well from their varying starting points. For example, in a Year 2 mathematics lesson, pupils made good progress in developing their understanding of inverse operations because they were required to think quickly. They accurately applied a range of subject-specific vocabulary. Well organised support from the teaching assistant meant that pupils who found the work more difficult also made gains in their learning. In a Year 3 and 4 mathematics lesson on multiplication, pupils made good progress because the different activities provided matched their individual starting points well. In a Year 6 science lesson seen, all groups of pupils made rapid gains in their understanding of acids and alkalines because the lesson was very carefully planned, well-paced and challenging. Pupils enjoyed speculating about which liquids would prove to be alkaline and which would be acidic and then testing their hypotheses through experiments.

The weaker teaching continues to be characterised by too slow a pace, poor quality questioning and work that is not challenging enough for the more able pupils. In these lessons, learning is not matched well enough to pupils' individual starting points. As a result, the work provided is too hard for some and too easy for others. In discussions with inspectors, the more able Year 5 pupils from one class shared their frustration that the work set in English and mathematics is not challenging enough. In contrast, pupils from the other class were highly supportive of the teaching they receive, commenting on how hard their teacher works to make learning challenging and fun. Staffing has been reorganised, with effect from next term to help address these weaknesses.

Teaching is meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils more effectively than before. Findings from a research project run by the Institute of Education have been shared with all staff by the Key Stage 1 leader. As a result, lessons are now organised to ensure that pupils eligible for the pupil premium spend more time being taught by their class teacher in small groups rather than by a teaching assistant. This approach is also securing better support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.

Good teaching is now seen more consistently in the nursery because the good practice identified in Reception at the time of the last inspection has now been implemented across the whole of the early year's provision. Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to children's learning in early years because they are carefully deployed to work with different groups of children and their work carefully monitored by the phase leader.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

During the visit, pupils were mostly observed behaving well. However, where the teaching was less effective, low level chatter slowed the pace of learning. Some pupils continue to 'switch off' when teachers' questioning is not pitched appropriately at the whole group or does not challenge them enough. As at the time of the section 5 inspection, pupils reported that they feel safe in the academy. They have particularly good awareness of how to stay safe online. Changes to playtime arrangements mean that there is less boisterous behaviour than before. The school's safeguarding policy meets requirements but has not been tailored to reflect the particular circumstances of the school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The headteacher, with good support from the academy business manager, has skilfully steered the academy through a difficult period of redundancies in order to tackle the serious budget deficit. The academy's finances are now much healthier with the result that the academy can now afford to build on the external support brokered to improve the quality of middle leadership in the weeks and months ahead.

All staff are highly supportive of the headteacher and share her determination to improve the academy and raise pupils' attainment. In discussions with inspectors, teachers commented on the quality of the headteacher's strategic planning. They have confidence in the changes the headteacher is bringing about to improve the academy. One teacher said, 'staff are more accountable now and more proactive and have been given the authority to carry out their roles properly'.

The academy's leadership capacity is growing with a number of staff pursuing courses and qualifications to improve their skills, including in senior leadership. Phase leaders have received training to help strengthen their understanding of their roles. However, they do not yet have the time to make the most of their improved leadership skills. The staff restructuring due to be implemented in September is intended to help remedy this.

Some important aspects of leadership remain weak. For example, while procedures to identify additional support needed by disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs have become slicker and the support provided for pupils is

planned more carefully, the monitoring of these pupils' achievement over time is not strong enough. In particular, the senior leader responsible does not provide strong enough oversight of specific interventions to make sure they are working. In addition, the analysis of the achievement of different groups of pupils is not searching enough. An electronic system to help improve analysis of pupils' achievement has now been purchased but not enough has been done in the interim to ensure that academy leaders, and governors, have a sufficiently clear view of the impact of the academy's work on all groups of pupils.

The headteacher has a good understanding of the quality of teaching in the academy and is skilled in diagnosing the strengths and weaknesses of individual lessons. Teachers have received training about how to improve their questioning skills and this aspect of teaching is improving. However, record keeping from lesson observations is not detailed or rigorous enough to enable the academy to inform reports to governors on the impact of actions taken to improve teaching overall. The monitoring of teaching has slipped recently due to the time taken to manage staff redundancies and to reorganise the curriculum next year. The headteacher has not received the support needed from the deputy headteacher to ensure that all aspects of teaching across the academy improve equally quickly.

The academy has received the findings from a recent external review of governance. This review judged that while some aspects of governance remain weak, governance is improving securely. Governors' visits to the academy have become more sharply focused on pupils' achievement. The revised committee structure means that governors are better placed to hold academy leaders to account for each of the areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection. All governors have received training to build their understanding of pupil performance data and they are able to question academy leaders increasingly well. However, although governors now receive regular reports on the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and each year group overall, they do not yet receive information on how well other groups, such as the more able pupils, are doing. Reports presented to governors on the quality of teaching lack sufficient detail and rigour.

Academy leaders are building on improvements to provision for disadvantaged pupils following an external review of its use of pupil premium funding earlier this term. An action plan is being developed to help ensure that gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school reduce quickly.

External support

The academy has received good support from an independent education consultant, for example in strengthening the quality of middle leadership. However, the range and quantity of support has been limited due to financial pressures on the academy. Now that these pressures have eased, increased external support is being planned for the Autumn term.