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Vicky Hayles
Executive Headteacher
Firbeck Academy
Firbeck Road
Wollaton
Nottingham
NG8 2FB

Dear Mrs Hayles

Special measures monitoring inspection of Firbeck Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 18 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2015.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with: the executive headteacher; acting headteacher; two representatives from the academy sponsor; three members of staff; four pupils; and the Chair of the Governing Body. I undertook a tour of the academy and considered documentation relating to the safeguarding of pupils. The sponsor's statement of action and the academy's improvement plans were evaluated.

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection, the long-serving headteacher has retired. The academy business manager also left the academy at the end of the spring term 2015. The governing body has made a number of appointments, who took up their positions at the beginning of the summer term 2015. These include: an executive headteacher, who oversees the work of the academy as well as that of Westdale Junior School; an acting headteacher, who works for four days each week; an acting deputy headteacher; an additional teacher who works with pupils in Year 2; and a teacher who covers classes while teachers undertake their statutory planning,

preparation and assessment time. The governing body has recently appointed a teacher who is working in the Nursery for the duration of the summer term 2015. In addition, they have appointed a head of school and an academy business manager, both of whom will commence their roles in September 2015. A new Chair of the Governing Body has been appointed from the beginning of the summer term 2015. This follows the resignation of his predecessor, who was in role at the time of the previous section 5 inspection. The building work that was taking place at the time of the previous section 5 inspection has now been completed.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

You have acted promptly to produce a detailed plan of how you intend to address the points for improvement identified at the last inspection. Your improvement plan clearly indicates the actions that will be taken to improve the academy's effectiveness. The plan covers all of the necessary areas for improvement, as well as additional ones that you have identified following your brief time leading the academy. Your plan makes it crystal clear who is responsible for each action and who will monitor and evaluate its impact. Your plan sets out clear measures of success. However, milestones relating to pupils' achievements could be more precise. This will enable governors to check more closely on the extent to which your actions are having a positive impact on pupils' achievements.

You have made a positive start in implementing your plan, particularly in relation to introducing systems and training to develop teachers' skills in assessing pupils' learning. You have put in place a new system for recording and tracking pupils' progress and attainment, which is helping you to quickly identify underachievement. Teachers have benefited from being involved in moderation activities to help develop their knowledge of the progression of pupils' writing skills, as well as judging the quality and standard of individual pieces of work.

Teachers say that they have benefited from working with colleagues from Westdale Junior School and that this has raised their expectations of what pupils can achieve. Teachers have responded positively to the clear guidance that you have provided in relation to what you expect to see in terms of the quality of learning environments. Pupils confirm that their classrooms are more stimulating places in which to learn.

You have worked closely with the acting headteacher to keep a close eye on the quality of teaching, through lesson observations and checking work in pupils' books. This is helping you to check on the extent to which staff are implementing what they have learnt from professional development activities, especially in relation to the teaching of writing.

You have commenced a review of key policies, including those relating to the presentation of pupils' work, teachers' marking and pupils' behaviour. Although these are at an early stage of development, it is clear that staff welcome the changes and challenge that you have introduced and can see that senior leaders are committed to improving the academy.

Governors have received frequent updates on your findings from your monitoring. This is helping them to keep abreast of the developments that are occurring at the academy. The recently appointed Chair of the Governing Body has a clear understanding of the academy's current position. He visits the academy regularly to check on the rate of implementation of the improvement plan.

The academy sponsor has acted swiftly following the section 5 inspection to secure staffing at senior leadership level and to appoint a Chair of the Governing Body. The sponsor has committed further funding to improve the quality of the accommodation, as well as to enhance the range and quality of resources to support pupils in their learning. Their statement of action dovetails with the academy's improvement plan and provides clear steps that the academy sponsor intend to take to address the weaknesses identified at the most recent inspection. The academy sponsor keeps a very close eye on developments at the bi-weekly meetings, which is also attended by senior leaders and governors.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

The sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint NQTs.

We also discussed ways in which the improvement plan should be strengthened through the addition of more detailed milestones relating to pupils' achievement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for Nottingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Carter
Her Majesty's Inspector

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