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Ann Lombardi
Principal
The Giffard Primary Catholic Academy and Nursery
Hordern Close
Hordern Road
Wolverhampton
WV6 0HR

Dear Mrs Lombardi

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Giffard Primary Catholic Academy and Nursery

Following my visit to your academy on 2 July 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 February 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, the academy committee and the board of directors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to ensure that:

- leaders further develop clarity in their work on the key areas for improvement and how these will continue to be monitored and evaluated
- the roles and responsibilities for all senior leaders are clearly established for the next academic year
- the academy committee further develops its understanding of the key areas of improvement, such as how the academy is developing writing
- feedback given to pupils is direct and consistently acted upon.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the you, other senior leaders, the school improvement advisor, members of the academy committee and board of directors to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The academy improvement plan and other documents were evaluated. A learning walk was undertaken with you and Acting Assistant Principal and school improvement advisor reports were analysed. Scrutinies of the latest pupil tracking data and pupil's books were carried out. The single central record of all the staff and volunteers working in the academy was checked as part of the inspection visit.

Academy tracking data indicates that pupils in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 are set to achieve better outcomes in 2015, compared to the 2014 national average. Marginally more children achieved a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage, although still significantly below the 2014 national average. Achievement in the Year 1 phonics (the sounds letters make) check has improved this year and is above the 2014 national average. Year 2 attainment in reading and maths has improved, but declined in writing. Year 2 attainment is likely to still be below the national average for the expected level in 2015. The school's predicted Year 6 attainment, which is yet to be moderated or confirmed, is set to improve in reading, writing and mathematics, to be at least in line with the 2014 national average for the expected level. Progress and attainment for both pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding and other pupils in Year 6 has improved in most areas. This is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible to receive free school meals or looked after by the local authority.

Year 6 pupils were seen writing today and the finished letters are imaginative, well-structured and show some improvements made during the lesson. Pupils' books in Reception, Year 2 and Year 6 contain an appropriate range of work. The Reception books are annotated and the other books are marked and show progress. However, pupils do not always act upon teachers' feedback, meaning progress is not rapid. Teachers' feedback comments for pupils are not always as direct as they could be.

Context

There have been no significant changes to leadership or staffing since the previous inspection. The Vice Principal is about to return to work following a maternity leave. A newly qualified teacher from within the Multi-Academy Company of schools has been appointed for September 2015 to cover a maternity leave in Key Stage 2.

Main findings

You are continuing to work closely with both another Principal who is part of the Multi-Academy Company and the school improvement advisor. This has resulted in

improved monitoring and evaluation of planning, teaching and pupil progress. The Acting Assistant Principal is leading improvements in the teaching of phonics (the sound that letters make) and English. Middle leaders are developing their roles and starting to have a greater strategic influence in improving mathematics and the provision for disabled pupils with those special educational needs.

Staff training has enabled teachers to improve the quality of teaching. Teachers are now working more closely together in 'trios' to share good practice and support improvement. Leadership roles are being shared out to help develop foundation subjects such as geography and history. The roles and responsibilities of senior leaders for September 2015 have not yet been finalised, as a result of some temporary changes due to a maternity leave. The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage changed just before the last full inspection. There have been some slight improvements to the outcomes for the current Reception children, but it is too early to measure the full impact of changes to the early years leadership.

The academy committee and directors continue to monitor the academy's performance closely. However, the committee does not have a complete understanding of the academy's work on the key improvement areas, such as writing. An external review of pupil premium spending has outlined areas where the academy can improve provision and clarify how future spending is more closely tailored to pupil outcomes. Leaders recognise there are still improvements to be made to further evaluate the impact of pupil premium spending to improve the use of the funding.

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

You have received effective support from a school improvement advisor and local Principal. The school improvement advisor has visited termly and written a full report following each visit. These reports have been shared and scrutinised by the board of directors. A Strategic Improvement Group was formed as part of this support and has helped steer the academy forwards. This group will continue to operate until it is no longer required.

Leaders correctly say they are on the right track to improve the effectiveness of the academy. Improvements have been made since the last inspection, although leaders know that not all improvements are yet consistent throughout the school. You are open and honest in your evaluations and recognise that further work still needs to be done to ensure the areas for development identified at the last inspection are clearly and fully addressed.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Academy Committee, the Chair of the board of directors.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Bellworthy
Her Majesty's Inspector