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2 July 2015

Matthew Flannigan
Interim Executive Principal
Nechells Primary E-ACT Academy
Eliot Street
Nechells
Birmingham
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Dear Mr Flannigan

Special measures monitoring inspection of Nechells Primary E-ACT Academy

Following my visit with Stuart Bellworthy, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 30 June –1 July 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 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 school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint NQTs. This is subject to prior consultation with Her Majesty's Inspector.

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, the Academies Advisers Unit and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Jane Millward

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- The Secretary of State
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- The lead and team inspectors.

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by making sure that all teachers:
 - take account of what pupils already know, understand and can do when planning activities, especially for more-able pupils and those who are disabled and have special educational needs
 - have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and the quality of work that pupils produce
 - provide pupils with the precise guidance they need to improve their work.

- Raise pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics by making sure that pupils:
 - spell correctly, use grammar and punctuation appropriately and write legibly
 - have the opportunity to solve more difficult mathematical problems
 - have regular chances to use and extend their reading, writing and mathematical skills and knowledge in different subjects.

- Ensure that all leaders and managers:
 - have the skills needed to check carefully the quality of teaching and pupils' learning
 - have the expertise required to help teachers improve their teaching
 - use information about pupils' achievement to check carefully how well different groups of pupils are learning
 - take prompt action once weaknesses are identified in teaching and pupils' learning
 - make sure that pupil premium funding is helping pupils who are eligible for this additional support to make good progress and reach higher standards in all year groups.

- Make sure that governors develop their skills so that they can ensure that leaders and managers help pupils make good and better progress.

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

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 30 June – 1 July 2015.

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the Chief Executive Officer of E-ACT, the Interim Executive Principal, senior leaders, groups of pupils, representatives from the governing body and representatives from the sponsor, E-ACT. Her Majesty's Inspectors observed parts of lessons, scrutinised a range of documents, including action plans, information about the progress made by pupils, records of the work of the governing body, attendance and exclusion records, and records showing how the academy cares for its pupils and keeps them safe.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, the Executive Principal has left the academy and an Interim Executive Principal (who was previously the academy's system leader for E-ACT) is currently leading the academy. A new Associate Principal has joined the academy, and new leadership roles have been created. These include a seconded special educational needs leader and a key stage leader. A new class teacher and premises manager have been appointed and a new governor, with responsibility for safeguarding, has joined the governing body. The Chair of the Governing Body has resigned with effect from 31 August 2015. The sponsor, E-ACT, has a new systems leader working with the academy.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Leaders in the academy have now refined tracking procedures for pupils' progress. This means that the progress pupils make can be monitored and evaluated. It is clear that this progress is too variable. The inconsistency is between classes, groups and subjects. Some pupils have made good progress, while others do not make enough progress. Most progress can be seen in Year 6.

Staffing instability has had a detrimental effect on pupils' progress. Where pupils have experienced several temporary teachers, the progress pupils make varies considerably. When permanent teachers have taught them, the pupils make better progress. The progress pupils make in reading and mathematics is better than in writing. This applies especially to the most-able pupils. The more accurate information that leaders hold means they can hold teachers to account for the progress pupils make. The academy's internal data have been moderated and verified.

Pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium funding (additional funding provided by the government for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those in public care) make similar progress to that of their classmates. In some cases their

progress is better than that of their peers. The use of this funding is rigorously monitored for the impact that it has. Consequently, leaders and governors are clear about the extent to which strategies to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils are proving successful.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs have not made enough progress in the past. This is because there has been a lack of clarity about how well they achieve and a lack of understanding of what they need to help them succeed. However, procedures and plans to provide better support to these pupils are now in place.

The progress children make in the early years is inconsistent and patchy at best. This is partly because of frequent changes in staffing, but also because there is a lack of focus on supporting children to make progress in all areas of learning. Opportunities to help children make progress are not frequent enough and, as a result, children do not get the best start to their education.

The quality of teaching

Pupils are beginning to make better progress because the quality of teaching is improving. A robust programme of training has been implemented to improve aspects of teaching across the academy. For example, training has been given to teachers on how to use questioning effectively to extend pupils' learning. All teachers have a development plan, which is based upon feedback from lesson observations. The plan identifies specific areas of their teaching to improve. All teachers work closely with a link teacher from another E-ACT academy to enable them to improve the quality of their teaching.

Some lessons enable pupils to make better progress. In these lessons, the teacher ensures pupils' learning needs are met and teachers use good subject knowledge to extend pupils' thinking. Pupils engage with this learning and are motivated to do well, showing good attitudes towards their work.

However, not all teaching is effective and some lessons do not support pupils' progress. In these lessons, teachers' expectations are not high enough and pupils are not challenged sufficiently. Teaching in the early years is variable and inconsistent. Children do not get a good start to their education because learning opportunities are not maximised when children start in the Nursery.

Feedback given to pupils about their work has improved. Class teachers are now routinely marking pupils' work and, in some instances, pupils respond to teachers' comments and this helps the pupils to make better progress. However, temporary teachers do not always provide useful guidance and, sometimes, provide no feedback or marking.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Generally, pupils are polite, well mannered and friendly. They get on well together and usually show respect to adults who work with them. Behaviour in the playground is positive and incidents of poor behaviour are reducing.

The new behaviour system is now showing a positive impact across the academy. Incidents of poor behaviour have declined and exclusions have reduced. Pupils told inspectors they like the positive acknowledgement they get from staff when they behave well.

In lessons, pupils' behaviour is better when they are motivated by their learning. In those situations, they show good attitudes to learning and are keen to do well. However, when teaching is less interesting and pupils' learning needs are not met, some pupils lose concentration, do less work and, as a result, make less progress.

Attendance has improved and is above the national average. More robust systems are in place to monitor and record pupils' absence. For example, absence due to holidays is now no longer authorised.

There have been some improvements in the academy's systems to safeguard pupils. However, leaders acknowledge there is still more to do. All staff have read the most up-to-date guidance and safeguarding has become an integral part of the induction of new staff. Training has been updated and all staff have received child protection and safeguarding training. Parents have been given information about safeguarding procedures in the academy.

Child protection records of how the academy keeps its most vulnerable pupils safe have improved. However, these records are not yet sufficiently robust. Leaders cannot yet be sure that everything is being done to ensure the safety of the most-vulnerable pupils. This includes working with other agencies and the local authority.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

There is greater clarity about what needs to improve at Nechells. Drive and determination to improve systems, procedures and outcomes for pupils are evident. Trustees, governors and leaders have worked effectively to tackle weaknesses when they appear. For example, since the last monitoring inspection, skilled leaders have been seconded to the academy to work on a range of priorities, including improving the quality of teaching.

The leadership structure is developing, although there remains some lack of clarity about who will have responsibility for vital aspects of the academy's work in September next. Some important roles have been filled. For example, the new special educational needs leader has made a very positive start and has quickly got to grips with what needs to be done. This includes better identification of pupils' needs, improved tracking procedures and training for staff. Some roles, however, are not yet filled. For example, no one manages the provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language and no one currently leads literacy across the academy.

The Early Years Foundation Stage does not have effective leadership. As a result, provision in this area is weak. This means that children are not getting a good enough start and this hinders the progress they make.

Work has been carried out to improve the delivery and content of subjects and pupils are taught a wider range of subjects. There is evidence that British values, such as democracy and respect, are now planned for and are woven through the curriculum. However, not all subjects are given enough relevance and priority. This applies especially where temporary teachers are teaching. In some instances, insufficient religious education is taught, which restricts pupils' understanding of a range of faiths and beliefs. This omission results from some teachers not adhering to the academy's subject plans.

The governing body has been strengthened. An E-ACT representative has joined the governing body and brings a wealth of experience about governance. Training has been delivered to strengthen governors' understanding of the issues facing the academy. Some governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body and representatives from E-ACT, are using their knowledge effectively to hold leaders to account. An external review of governance has recently taken place and the governing body are acting upon the findings.

There is a rigorous approach to evaluating the impact of the pupil premium funding and there is clarity about which aspects provide the best value for money. As a result, pupils eligible for the funding achieve at least as well as their peers.

Links are developing with other successful schools. These links are having a significant impact in helping Nechells to move forward. Additional teachers and leaders are working within the academy to share good practice. This is well received by staff.

External support

E-ACT has prioritised improving this academy. Significant resources have been organised to support the academy. E-ACT staff have been deployed to challenge and support leaders and, as a result, developments in aspects of the academy's work are

now evident. E-ACT acknowledges more work is urgently needed, but there is now clarity about what should be achieved. Regular, robust meetings are held to monitor the improvements of the academy and E-ACT representatives are holding the leaders to account for their work.