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Mr M Frost
Meadow Park Academy
Norcot Road
Tilehurst
Reading
Berkshire
RG30 6BS

Dear Mr Frost

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Meadow Park Academy

Following my visit to your academy on Tuesday 20 October 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 was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in July 2014. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good by:
 - ensuring all teachers have sufficiently high expectations of what all pupils can achieve and how quickly they can work and learn
 - ensuring marking, especially in mathematics, provides pupils with clear guidance on how they can improve
 - making sure questions are suitably challenging for different pupils to check and extend their understanding
 - providing opportunities for teachers to observe and learn from outstanding teaching in other schools.
- Raise standards and improve pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - making sure all staff are sufficiently trained and skilled in teaching phonics and that they apply a consistent approach that builds pupils' skills and understanding throughout the school
 - ensuring pupils always present their work accurately and with care
 - setting challenging tasks for all pupils, especially the most able, based on accurate assessments of their abilities and what they need to learn next.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including the work of governors and the academy sponsor, by:
 - developing the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching so that teachers and leaders have a clear understanding of where they need to improve and what support there is to help them make those improvements
 - improving governors' ability to challenge the school effectively to improve and ensure pupil premium funding and sports funding are used appropriately
 - extending pupils' knowledge and understanding of different faiths and beliefs.
- Ensuring all staff consistently apply the school's behaviour policy so that the behaviour of all pupils is good and that learning is not disrupted.

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

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 20 October 2015.

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector met with the headteacher, the executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the academy sponsor, CfBT, and a group of middle leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of improvements being made at the academy. The inspector carried out four lesson observations jointly with the headteacher and executive headteacher, during which pupils' work was scrutinised. The inspector reviewed a range of documentation, including leaders' own evaluations of the academy, the academy improvement plan, minutes of meetings of the governing body, leaders' analysis of the use of the pupil premium grant and the academy sponsors' statement of action.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, there have been a number of changes to teaching staff at the academy. The acting headteacher has taken up the substantive post and a new deputy headteacher has been appointed. New collaborative arrangements have been brokered between Abbey Woods Academy, which is also part of the academy sponsor trust, and Meadow Park; this includes the appointment of an executive headteacher for both schools.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

Under the calm, committed leadership of the headteacher, the academy has continued to improve. Senior leadership has been strengthened by the appointment of personnel to key posts, for example the new deputy headteacher and leaders for assessment and the early years. All the new leaders share the headteacher's commitment to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning have been strengthened further. Senior leaders undertake a range of activities to evaluate the effectiveness of provision. The executive headteacher has helped to ensure that leaders make the best use of the information they are gathering. She has ensured that leaders take a dispassionate view when judging the quality of provision at the academy. As a result, leaders' evaluations of the academy's effectiveness are accurate and plans for improvement are effective. An example of this is the changes to performance management arrangements, which demonstrate increased expectations of teachers. Turnover of staff has been successfully reduced and new appointments have continued to strengthen the quality of provision.

Leaders have made some useful changes to the curriculum to meet the needs of their pupils. This is shown in the new approach to teaching mathematics which provides better opportunities for pupils to explore number and calculation. Further opportunities are now included for pupils to celebrate their cultural similarities and

differences, for example celebrating a Jewish harvest and learning about the different languages spoken by pupils.

Middle leadership is less well developed. Senior leaders take responsibility for many of the key subjects and areas of the curriculum, such as the deputy headteacher leading mathematics. Some subjects are led by teachers who have only been given the responsibility recently. They have not had the chance to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects and so do not have clear plans for how they want to improve their subjects further.

Governors are much more effective than they were. The Chair of the Governing Body has been instrumental in holding leaders to account for improvements that have been needed at the academy. Governors visit the academy regularly to check that information they receive from leaders is accurate. They receive useful reports from the headteacher about the progress being made at the academy. They use this to challenge leaders in meetings through their more robust questions. Sometimes, the documents that record the work of governors is not as clear as it could be. This means that, at times, governors rely on their recall rather than documented information when deciding what action to take.

The use of resources, such as the pupil premium grant, is still not as effective as it needs to be. Leaders have made a number of sensible decisions about how to use the pupil premium in the past, but have not tracked carefully enough the progress that eligible pupils are making as a result. Although the grant has helped to bring about improvements to teaching, it has not always been as effective as it could be in narrowing the gaps in attainment for all cohorts of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have, rightly, identified the need to improve the difference the grant makes for disadvantaged pupils further. This is now a priority for the academy.

The quality of teaching has continued to improve. Teachers now consistently expect pupils to behave well, both in lessons and around the academy. Staff apply the academy's behaviour policy consistently. The marking policy has been amended and improved by leaders and is consistently applied by teachers in all subjects. Teachers think more carefully about the types of questions they want to explore with pupils in lessons. However, leaders have rightly identified that there is more to do.

Not all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can learn. Some teachers still do not give pupils enough time to think about the more open-ended questions they have been asked. They too readily give pupils the answer before they have had time to think. This means that, in these lessons, pupils do not always have enough opportunity to think deeply about their learning and so do not make as much progress as they could.

The improved effectiveness of teaching is evident in the outcomes that pupils are now achieving. Attainment in all three key stages at the end of 2015 continued to rise. Leaders have rightly identified that some inconsistencies remain, such as

writing in Key Stage 1. This is reflected in the standard of writing that was seen in pupils' books, as well as in the results achieved by the previous Year 2 cohort.

The work of leaders to improve the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) has been effective. Teachers have good subject knowledge and ensure that pupils can apply their phonics skills in their reading and writing. Results in the phonics screening tests have improved as a result. This is because leaders have ensured that teachers assess pupils' progress carefully to ensure pupils build on what they already know.

Disadvantaged pupils are still not achieving as well as they should. The academy's current assessment information shows that this is improving, but the gap in attainment compared to other pupils nationally remains too wide. This is particularly the case for pupils in Years 5 and 6.

Strengths in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- Senior leaders, such as the deputy headteacher, head of the early years and the lead for assessment, are now established and share the headteacher's commitment to securing improvement.
- All members of the academy community work together to bring about improvement because of the unifying leadership of the headteacher.
- Leaders work in an evaluative way. They continue to review and improve how they lead and manage the academy.
- Effective use is made of collaborative opportunities with staff from other schools and academies to improve provision.

Weaknesses in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- Governors have not challenged leaders sufficiently about the use of the pupil premium grant.

External support

Consultants from the academy sponsor trust, CfBT, continue to provide effective and robust support to academy leaders. An example of this is the appointment of the services of the executive headteacher, which has ensured that leaders maintain the necessary rate of improvement. Collaborative arrangements with Church End School, a teaching school, are funded by the trust. They have also funded training and support for leaders and facilitate opportunities to help leaders develop the curriculum, such as the changes made to mathematics. The head of primary support from the trust remains the Chair of the Governing Body. This allows the trust to maintain close scrutiny of the effectiveness of academy leaders. Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection, the academy sponsor has now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose.