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Mrs Vicky Hayles and Mr Jason Osprey
Executive Principal and Head of School
Firbeck Academy
Firbeck Road
Wollaton
Nottingham
NG8 2FB

Dear Mrs Hayles and Mr Osprey

Special measures monitoring inspection of Firbeck Academy

Following my visit with Victoria Johnson, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 3 and 4 November 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2015. 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:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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 Nottingham.

Yours sincerely

David Carter
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, including in the early years, by:
 - using assessment more effectively to identify the particular learning needs of all pupils
 - ensuring that the work provided for the pupils is focused on meeting their particular learning needs
 - ensuring that the work provided for pupils builds on their prior learning and allows opportunities for them to extend their learning
 - ensuring that the work provides sufficient and appropriate challenge for all groups of pupils, in particular the most-able pupils
 - providing the pupils with precise information about how well they are doing and how they can improve, with reference to the relevant knowledge, skills and understanding
 - challenging and promoting the pupils' oracy and literacy consistently when commenting on the pupils' responses in lessons
 - establishing consistently high expectations of the pupils in relation to the presentation of their work
 - being more alert to and challenging any behaviour when pupils appear to be losing concentration or motivation
 - ensuring that classroom routines and the organisation of the pupils' work does not slow or interfere with learning.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including in the early years by:
 - focusing unequivocally on improving the quality of teaching
 - setting out a clear strategy and direction for improving the quality of teaching
 - ensuring that plans spell out clearly and precisely what actions will be taken to improve the quality of teaching
 - evaluating the quality of teaching incisively through rigorous analysis of all the available evidence, including data about pupils' achievement
 - ensuring that teachers with responsibilities are enabled to make a full contribution to monitoring and evaluating the impact of the quality of teaching
 - ensuring that all aspects of the school's work are evaluated equally rigorously, including pupils' behaviour and safety.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 3 and 4 November 2015.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work and met with: the executive principal; the head of school; a representative from the Torch Teaching School Alliance; four members of the governing body; leaders responsible for English, mathematics and child protection; and groups of pupils from Key Stages 1 and 2. Inspectors visited lessons, talked to pupils about their learning and evaluated the quality of their work in a range of subjects. Inspectors considered the academy's most recent data on the attainment and progress of groups of pupils. The quality of the academy's improvement plan was evaluated. Documentation relating to pupils' attendance, the behaviour and safety of pupils and arrangements for safeguarding pupils were also considered.

Context

Since the first monitoring visit, which took place in June 2015, there have been some staffing changes. From 1 September 2015, a new senior leadership team has been formed following a number of permanent appointments. These include the positions of head of school, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. A newly appointed business manager supports the work of the leadership team. In addition, two new members of staff have been appointed: a teacher of Year 5 pupils and a permanent teacher for children in the Reception class. One teacher has left the school. The governing body has appointed one governor who represents the academy sponsor, Nottingham University Samworth Academy. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, who were previously taught in one class, have been separated; there is now one class each for Nursery and Reception-aged children. The accommodation of the building continues to be redeveloped; the former central block has been demolished in preparation for the building of new classrooms for the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' outcomes in the 2015 national tests showed improvement from the previous year. The number of children securing a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage improved markedly, with 64% of children reaching the expected standard. More pupils attained the expected standard in their understanding of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) by the end of Year 1 than in previous years. This was above average. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 rose sharply from the previous year. The standards that pupils attained in reading, writing and mathematics were broadly average. Disadvantaged pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 attained higher standards than others in the class and matched the standards of all pupils nationally. Pupils who speak English as an additional

language attained standards that were lower than those who speak English as their first language.

Standards of attainment at the end of Year 6 in mathematics were broadly average, with the large majority of pupils making at least expected progress during Key Stage 2. Nevertheless, standards in reading and writing at the end of Year 6 remain low. Pupils did not make fast enough progress in these subjects during their time in Key Stage 2. Disadvantaged pupils attained standards that were about two terms behind other pupils' nationally in reading, writing and mathematics and about half a term behind others in the class. Although all of the most-able pupils in the Year 6 class made expected progress in mathematics during their time in Key Stage 2, not all of them made expected progress in reading or writing.

Senior leaders have provided staff with clear guidance about the standards they expect to see in pupils' handwriting and presentation of work. Despite pupils practising their skills in handwriting more frequently, they are not always transferring their skills from handwriting exercises into their everyday written work. The quality of the presentation of pupils' work remains too variable across the academy.

Pupils are being provided with frequent opportunities to develop their skills in calculating. However, they are not being given enough activities to enable them to apply their knowledge and skills to solve mathematical problems or to help them develop their ability to secure better skills in reasoning.

In the 2015 end of Key Stage 2 tests, boys attained higher standards than girls in mathematics, reading, writing and grammar, punctuation and spelling. Boys also made faster progress than girls across Key Stage 2. However, in most year groups and subjects, girls across the school are making faster progress than boys and are subsequently attaining higher standards.

Pupils' attainment across Key Stage 1 shows signs of improvement. However, standards of attainment in Key Stage 2 remain low in Years 4, 5 and 6. As a result, leaders have set ambitious targets for these pupils, which is underpinned by a range of support to try and ensure that a greater proportion of pupils in Key Stage 2 are meeting age-related expectations by the end of the academic year.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers are responding positively to the guidance that they have been given from senior leaders to improve their practice and address the issues that were identified for improvement at the most recent section 5 inspection. As a result, there are green shoots of improvement.

Adults working in the Early Years Foundation Stage have benefited from the Nursery and Reception classes being taught separately. Adults have a larger area to work in and to organise activities so that children can develop their knowledge and skills more effectively in all areas of learning. Relationships between adults and children are positive; children are responding well to the interesting activities that are being presented to them. Leaders and teachers recognise that adults' use of assessment and checks on learning during lessons needs to be more precise, particularly so that the most-able children are provided with sufficient challenge in their work.

Teaching in Key Stage 2 is improving. Staff have established clear rules and routines for classroom behaviour and are presenting learning in interesting ways, which captures, and for most of the time sustains, pupils' interest. Pupils are keen to do well and are showing positive attitudes to their learning. Teachers are becoming more accustomed to using the new assessment system to inform their planning; however, invariably, not enough challenge is being provided for the most-able pupils.

Teachers in Key Stage 1 are working hard to implement the revised policies and guidance that has been set by senior leaders. Nevertheless, they have found it more challenging to capture and sustain pupils' interest in their learning for the duration of lessons. This is slowing the pace of learning in this part of the school.

Senior leaders have introduced a new marking and feedback policy. This is being implemented in all classes; marking is regular and usually detailed, in celebrating what pupils are doing well. Nevertheless, it is only very recently that teachers are providing pupils with more detailed prompts and guidance on how they can improve their work, which is in line with the school's policy. While it is clear that teachers' marking is improving, this is at an early stage of having a significant impact on pupils' progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Senior leaders have introduced a new behaviour code. This sets out clearly the rewards that are to be awarded to pupils who behave well and the consequences for those who choose not to. Pupils say that the new code is helping to improve behaviour during lessons and around the academy. This was evident in visits to classes in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 2, where pupils demonstrated positive attitudes to learning; they listened attentively to teachers' presentations of learning and followed instructions straight away. However, this was not the case in Key Stage 1. Teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour in classrooms is not consistently high enough. Low-level disruption still persists in classes where rules and routines are not firmly established or applied consistently.

Pupils' attendance rates have improved markedly in the last academic year. As a result, attendance is at least average and is still improving. This is because senior leaders follow up absence more closely. The number of pupils who are persistently absent has also reduced. The parental support worker has introduced a 'walking bus system', where pupils are escorted to school. This has proved highly effective in ensuring that pupils are punctual to school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The executive headteacher has provided authoritative leadership since she began her role at the academy during the summer term of 2015. She has recruited and successfully inducted new members of staff and is forging an effective working relationship with the head of school. Together, they have led the introduction of new approaches which are beginning to secure improvements.

Senior leaders have provided staff with clear guidance relating to displays in classrooms and corridors, as well as in what is expected of pupils in relation to their behaviour. This is helping to communicate higher expectations of what pupils can achieve, and is helping to increase the pace of change. In the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 2 this has resulted in a more positive climate for learning.

Senior leaders have put in place a more robust system for checking on the quality of teaching. Regular visits to classrooms have enabled senior leaders to provide staff with detailed feedback on how they can improve their practice. This is also helping them to keep a check on how well staff are implementing new policies and responding to advice following professional development activities.

Leaders have introduced a new system for recording and tracking the progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils. This is helping them to hold teachers to account for the progress that their pupils are making and to identify differences in performance between different groups of pupils. As a result, leaders have recognised that the most-able pupils need to be challenged further, to ensure that they reach high standards by the time they leave the academy.

The leader responsible for mathematics has recently undertaken an audit of resources and taken into account the views of staff in how best to teach the subject. This has accurately identified the need for pupils to undertake more work in applying their knowledge and skills to solve problems, and that will help them to hone their skills in mathematical reasoning.

The leaders responsible for English have recognised that pupils' skills in the technical aspects of writing, such as spelling, are not being developed well enough. As a result, they intend to deliver training to staff on this aspect in the near future. Leaders have introduced a new home-school diary, so that they can keep a closer

check on what pupils are reading and how often. Pupils say that the new system is working well and that this is helping them to understand the importance of reading widely.

Governors are undertaking more frequent visits to the academy and are checking on the rate of implementation of the action plan. The strategic group continues to meet bi-weekly and review progress; they challenge senior leaders to ensure that the rate of improvement is raised at an appropriate pace.

External support

The executive headteacher and the academy sponsor have brokered and commissioned external support from a range of sources. Links with Westdale Junior School have continued; the assistant headteacher, who is responsible for teaching Year 6 pupils, has benefited from observing and holding meetings with a colleague from this school. This has helped to raise his expectations of what pupils can achieve.

The partnership with the Torch Teaching School Alliance has ensured that the executive headteacher and head of school regularly meet with colleagues to commission additional support for individual teachers, as well as draw upon the experience of a wide range of school leaders. This is helping to inform their thinking in relation to managing change within the academy.

The executive headteacher has recently brokered support from the local authority that will be targeted at improving further the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Although the full impact of the external support on improving outcomes is at an early stage, senior leaders are keeping a close eye on the extent to which this is helping to improve teaching and meet the milestones that are set out in the academy's improvement plans.

In addition to the areas for improvement listed in the annex, the school should take further action to:

- provide pupils with more challenging activities that enable them to develop their ability to solve problems and reason in mathematics.