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Mrs Sue Cox
Interim Headteacher
Queen Eleanor Academy
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Dear Mrs Cox

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Queen Eleanor Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 1 December 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 is the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement, identified at the recent section 5 inspection, in order to become a good academy.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the interim headteacher, deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, the reception class teacher, pupils, the Vice-chair of the Governing Body, and two representatives of the academy trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited every classroom and scrutinised a range of documents, including the outcomes of leaders' monitoring activities. I evaluated the school improvement plan. I gave feedback to the interim headteacher, deputy headteacher, the Vice-chair of the Governing Body, the Chief Executive Officer, the Director of Education and the Director of Standards for the academy trust.

Context

Since the last inspection, a new deputy headteacher has been appointed. He was previously an assistant headteacher at the school. Your leadership team has been restructured. Two full-time teachers left the school at the end of the summer term. A newly qualified teacher was appointed, in Year 3, in September 2015. A new teaching assistant to support pupils with special educational needs has been appointed and a new mathematics leader took up her post in November 2015.

Main findings

Leaders have acted swiftly to improve the quality of teaching. You and your deputy headteacher work as an effective team. You have established a culture where teachers are accountable for the progress that the pupils make. Your deputy headteacher has organised a programme of training and support to enable teachers to improve their practice. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving rapidly.

You and your deputy headteacher have increased the number of checks made on the quality of teaching and learning in the academy. Governors have also visited to check the progress the academy is making. They have fed back their findings to the full governing body. You regularly visit each class, review a range of pupils' books and give developmental feedback to all staff. The deputy headteacher also visits classrooms, provides feedback to individual teachers and then follows up development points during his next monitoring activity, to check for improvements. However, the outcomes of monitoring activities are not always recorded in a structured way, to provide a concise view of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning across the academy. Nevertheless, the positive impact of the monitoring activities is evident through the good progress in pupils' books.

Subject leadership roles are developing throughout the academy. All teachers have now been given subject leadership roles. Training has taken place to inform staff of their responsibilities as curriculum leaders. However, apart from the English leader, who is the deputy headteacher, subject leaders have not yet had the opportunity to monitor standards in their subjects. Senior leaders recognise that this is the next step for subject leaders, so that they can further support the improvement of teaching and learning across the academy.

Provision in the early years has improved markedly. The new Reception class teacher has overhauled planning and brought in regular assessments to find out what the children know. She uses this information to plan the next steps of learning for her class. The teacher plans a good range of activities to help children to improve their language and communication skills. For example, pupils follow up stories that they have read by building models to help them to act out the stories. Children enjoy learning and stay focused for considerable amounts of time. This helps them to make speedier progress. The teacher deploys the teaching assistants well and builds questions into her planning for all adults to move the children's learning forward

effectively. Teaching has placed a strong emphasis on children sounding out letters, and writing the letters correctly. As a result, most children now know all the initial sounds of the alphabet and can write their names.

Teachers are providing pupils with more opportunities than previously to write at length, and for different purposes, in subjects other than English. In Year 4, pupils wrote extended Roman diaries to a good standard. In Year 3, pupils have been enthused to write Viking legends using paragraphs and adverbial phrases.

Leaders are now tracking the progress of the most-able pupils. There was a sharp increase in the number of pupils attaining Level 5 in mathematics and writing at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2015. A group of the most-able pupils told me that the work in English and mathematics really challenges them. Current work in pupils' books shows that this group of pupils are making good progress. However, leaders recognise that not enough of the pupils who are disadvantaged made more than expected progress in reading and writing by the end of Key Stage 2, to reach the higher Level 5 in both of these two areas. I have asked you, and other leaders, to check more closely on the progress made by this group of pupils.

Teachers deploy teaching assistants effectively to work with pupils in classes in the mornings and then deliver specific intervention programmes to groups of pupils in the afternoon. The progress of pupils in these intervention groups is carefully tracked, and leaders are aware that good progress is being made currently.

The presentation of pupils' work is improving. On some occasions, presentation standards can slip for a few pupils when they do not underline dates and titles with a ruler. Close scrutiny of pupils' books shows that most pupils do not yet consistently join up their handwriting.

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

The academy trust has provided good support and challenge for the academy. In particular, support in the early years has helped to transform practice and children are making accelerated progress, often from low starting points. The trust has supported leaders in their monitoring roles to raise standards. Leaders have fully appreciated the support and challenge from the trust, and have responded positively. As a result, the quality of teaching and the rate of pupils' progress are improving.

I am copying this letter to the Chief Executive Officer of the academy trust, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Northampton and the Regional Schools Commissioner for South-Central England and North-West London.

Yours sincerely

Martin Finch
Her Majesty's Inspector