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Ms Leigh Oliver
The Ferrars Academy
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Dear Ms Oliver

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ferrars Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 30 November 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 June 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors 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, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and two members of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also had a telephone discussion with an external, independent consultant who supports the academy. The academy's improvement plan, self-evaluation documents, single central record and the minutes of governing body meetings were evaluated. I visited lessons in all classes with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher where we observed teaching and looked at pupils' work.

Context

Since the last inspection, one teacher has left the academy and has been permanently replaced. The deputy headteacher no longer has responsibility for teaching a class and is now focused on supporting the academy's improvement.

Main findings

You responded to the findings of the recent inspection quickly, setting out an improvement plan that targets the right areas. You are aware of the academy's strengths and weaknesses, and your self-evaluation is accurate and succinct; it communicates in clear terms why the academy is not yet good and what needs to be better. This transparent approach to academy improvement has been effective as there are clear signs of progress in important areas.

Writing was identified at the inspection as an area where improvement was needed and you have made this a priority. Through your monitoring work, you acquired an accurate view of what is working well and where more support is required.

In a scrutiny of pupils' writing, it was clear that, by the time pupils reach Year 2, many are writing at a standard expected of their age. Their letters are frequently well formed and they are using an expanding range of punctuation. In addition, teachers are setting high expectations and this is reflected in the kinds of words that pupils use in their writing; for example, one girl started a sentence with the word 'throughout' in her retelling of the Cinderella story. The progress that pupils are making in their writing in this year group is good.

In Year 1, standards in writing are also rising but this is inconsistent across the three classes. Low expectations in one class are restricting the rate of progress; here, pupils' work is untidy, their letters are poorly formed and there is little sign of improvement for too many pupils. In contrast, other pupils are progressing quickly and are responding well to clear teaching and an expectation that pupils will learn to write well.

Writing in the early years is underdeveloped. Children entering the Reception class have had too little experience of writing when in the Nursery and this puts them at a disadvantage. Many children in the Reception class are at a very early stage of writing and much more work is needed to enable them to catch up so that they are ready for Year 1.

You have recently implemented a new assessment system across Key Stage 1. You are now moderating the accuracy of teachers' assessments and have already identified where improvements are needed. In the past, assessment in the early years was overly generous and you are acting to improve this, but this will not occur quickly unless changes are made to the way that teaching assistants in the Nursery interact with children and assess them as they are learning. Opportunities to

precisely support children in the development of their speaking and listening skills are frequently being missed. Activities with the potential to expand children's language and confidence are not interactive enough, and those questions that are asked of the children result in brief responses. In a Nursery where a significant proportion of children are learning English as an additional language, more needs to be done to strategically promote speech and conversation.

Leadership is improving because you have distributed it more evenly across the academy. Leadership in Year 2, for example, is supporting the strong progress in that year group. Leadership in the early years is not so clearly defined, and you are actively recruiting at present to tackle this problem.

Governors are providing you with more challenge than in the past. The minutes of their meetings show an increase in the frequency and quality of questions that are being asked. They are increasing their presence in the academy through visits. For example, one governor has started to monitor the effectiveness of the new assessment system and is keen to revisit to check progress.

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 makes good use of an external consultant to moderate their own judgements. Regular communication and evaluation of progress are provided and support the academy's self-evaluation systems.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Luton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Moodie
Her Majesty's Inspector