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Wendy Baxter
Principal
Ark Chamberlain Primary Academy
Oldknow Road
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Birmingham
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Dear Mrs Baxter

Special measures monitoring inspection of Ark Chamberlain Primary Academy

Following my visit with Sarah Somers, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 15 and 16 December 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2015.

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.

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

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Local Governing Body, the Regional Director of Birmingham Primaries at Ark Schools, and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise the attainment and progress of pupils, especially in writing, by ensuring that:
 - work is matched to pupils' different abilities and takes into account their starting points
 - pupils are given more opportunities to write at length across a range of subjects
 - the most-able pupils are provided with appropriate challenge and the less able are given the support they need
 - disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are given the guidance they need to make good progress
 - the feedback teachers give to pupils consistently guides them on what they need to do to improve their work
 - the academy is less dependent on temporary supply teachers.
- Improve safeguarding procedures by:
 - providing training for all staff in safeguarding, child protection and the potential risks of radicalisation and extremism
 - ensuring that all staff are appropriately trained in issues of health and safety
 - ensuring that all staff and leaders are fully aware of child protection procedures
 - improving the links between the academy's designated lead for safeguarding and the governing body.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - providing training and support for leaders to develop and fulfil their roles
 - clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the governing body and ensuring it holds leaders to account for their actions
 - effectively monitoring the impact of the pupil premium to ensure it provides value for money
 - ensuring that the academy has a stable and sustainable leadership team which is not reliant on external support
 - ensuring that the academy has a realistic view of its strengths and weaknesses and devises plans to address its priorities for improvement.

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 December 2015

Evidence

In addition to observing parts of lessons, inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal and senior leadership team, three members of the local governing body, including the Chair, and the Regional Director of Primaries for Birmingham Ark Schools (the academy's sponsor). Inspectors spoke to parents at the start of the first of the two days of the inspection to seek their views. Inspectors also held informal discussions with pupils during lessons and at breaktimes to seek their views about how safe they feel and what they think about the academy. Her Majesty's Inspector met a group of pupils to hear them read, discuss their work and progress in writing and mathematics, and to seek their views about pupils' behaviour and safety. Safeguarding, child protection policies and staff vetting procedures were inspected.

The foci for this first monitoring inspection are the extent to which the academy's action plan is fit for purpose and the actions taken to improve safeguarding and teaching since the inspection in June 2015.

Context

At the time of the previous inspection in June 2015 the academy was known as Oldknow Academy. In September 2015, Ark Schools became the proprietor and sponsor. The sponsor decided to change the name of the academy to the Ark Chamberlain Primary Academy.

There has been a high turnover of staff since the inspection in June 2015. Eleven teachers, including members of the former leadership team, left in the summer term and nine teachers have joined in September 2015, including the Principal, vice-principal and an assistant vice-principal. Some of those that joined in September had returned after family leave. Three more teachers will be joining the academy in January 2016 and one teacher is returning from family leave. A local governing body was appointed by Ark Schools and replaced the former governing body. There are currently six governors, with plans in place to appoint more. In addition to the turnover of teachers, there have also been changes and appointments of support staff and long-term supply teachers.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics varies considerably across classes, reflecting the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. The most recent

unvalidated national test results show that Year 6 pupils did not achieve as well as they should in writing. This is still the case and, as reported at the time of the last inspection in June 2015, pupils do better in reading and mathematics but their progress is not consistent across the academy. Standards improve in Years 5 and 6 because there is more consistently good teaching, particularly in most Year 6 classes. The inconsistencies evident in teaching are starker in Years 3 and 4, where staffing instability and weaker teaching are holding pupils back, particularly the most-able pupils.

The pace of learning is too slow in some lessons. Inconsistent expectations are more evident in the quality of pupils' writing. Pupils' handwriting is often uneven and lacks consistent form and structure. Too many pupils, particularly in Years 3 and 4, make unnecessary and repeated spelling errors. There is more extended and independent writing in books, but again, the quality and quantity of writing varies too much across classes.

Currently, more stable leadership and sharper assessments of pupils' progress across the academy are helping leaders and staff to identify groups and individual pupils who need to catch up on previous lost ground. There are some early signs of improvement to pupils' progress and performance. In mathematics, for example, and as reflected in last year's test results, the percentage of pupils reaching or exceeding age-related levels is higher than it is in reading and writing.

Leaders, governors and staff are aware that, despite some early signs of improved teaching in some classes, achievement gaps still exist between different groups. Disadvantaged pupils, particularly boys, are approximately one term behind other pupils in reading and writing. Pupils with disabilities or special educational needs do not always receive the most appropriate support or intervention in lessons to help them make enough progress towards their individual learning targets. Systems to monitor their progress are improving, however, and the academy's leaders are refining and improving the way teachers check and monitor pupils' progress. The same weaknesses apply to pupils in the early stages of learning to speak English where teachers and teaching assistants are not always engaging pupils enough to improve their spoken English.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders and governors have started to make some progress improving teaching. Senior leaders now undertake more routine and systematic checks on the quality of teaching and pupils' work in books. There are some early signs that this level of scrutiny is bearing fruit. Nonetheless, there remain inconsistencies across the

academy. There is still a lot to do to increase the amount of consistently good or better teaching.

Overall, assessments of pupils' progress and performance, and the scrutiny of pupils' work and teaching over time, show that the strongest teaching is in Year 6 and the weakest is in Year 3. There are pockets of good practice in other classes, but at the same time, there is too much teaching that requires improvement or that is inadequate across the academy.

Senior leaders are adapting and updating assessment systems to bring them more into line with the requirements of the new National Curriculum. It is still too early to see the impact of this as teachers are only now starting to get to grips with this new assessment information in order to plan their lessons more consistently. There are still too many teachers who do not adapt their teaching to meet the needs of pupils across the ability range, particularly for the most-able pupils. Teachers are not always analysing or checking assessment information about different groups, such as disadvantaged pupils or those in the early stages of learning to speak English, to plan lessons or work that meet pupils' needs and capabilities. During lessons, some teachers and teaching assistants do not check to identify gaps in pupils' learning or provide enough work to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding.

The most effective teaching is more intuitive and adapts to the needs of individual pupils and groups. In these lessons, and more commonly in Year 6, teachers provide extension tasks and place greater demands on pupils. The pace of learning in such lessons is more productive and pupils are expected to work harder and learn more. For example, in one of the English lessons observed by an inspector, pupils in Year 6 were given ample opportunities to discuss key features of their writing, which enabled them to identify how they could improve and edit their work. In mathematics books, some of the most effective marking and teaching provides challenge and more ambitious learning targets for pupils to aim for.

In some of the lessons observed by inspectors, and evidence from the work pupils complete in books, expectations are inconsistent and teaching is not always ambitious enough. Teachers and support staff are not adapting their planned activities enough to extend learning for those pupils capable of reaching high standards. In some lessons, teaching assistants are not engaging pupils or intervening to provide the right level of support, particularly for pupils who find learning difficult or have additional learning needs. Some workbooks show that pupils do too little work or mark time. In some lessons observed by inspectors, for example, undemanding work affected pupils' behaviour, and particularly that of boys, so they lost interest or disturbed other pupils. The most effective teachers and

support staff make sure that pupils are on task and provide help by intervening and checking that pupils are working hard enough.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are polite, usually well behaved and attentive in lessons, and conduct themselves responsibly when moving from class to class or around the academy. Pupils enjoy their time in the academy and wear their smart new uniform with pride. They are courteous and respectful to other pupils, visitors and staff and enjoy attending the academy regularly. This is also reflected in attendance rates that are well above the national average.

There is a positive climate for learning in classrooms and around the academy, although in some lessons where the work is undemanding or mundane, some pupils, and mainly boys, lose interest and interrupt others so that learning slows. Nevertheless, pupils are keen to do their best and usually cooperate with others during lessons when working in pairs or groups. The academy's library is a wonderful resource that is used to good effect. For example, Year 4 pupils recently posted book reviews on the academy's internal computer social media site. Other pupils have responded on these safe and secure internal 'chat lines' by praising their classmates for their efforts and appreciating the time and care they have taken to tell them about the books they read recently. This, like many other examples across the academy, demonstrates well how pupils value each other's efforts.

Pupils learn about major world faiths, customs and cultures and this prepares them well for life beyond the academy in modern multicultural and multi-faith Britain. The work displayed around the academy shows that pupils are taught to respect and appreciate British values of tolerance, respect and democracy. They are fully aware of the bravery of famous individuals in past and recent history who have made a big difference championing the causes of civil rights, democracy and equality. For example, pupils proudly recalled what they had learned about the achievements of famous people such as Malala Yousafzi. Pupils clearly understand the bravery and struggles that Malala experienced, leading her to promote the importance of women's rights and girls' education in parts of the world where they cannot be taken for granted. Projects and topics like these are having a very positive effect on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.

Pupils feel safe and secure in school and they know who to go to if they have concerns or worries. Older pupils look after younger ones in the playground and act as 'buddies' if pupils are upset or hurt. They say, and rightly so, that bullying is very rare and that adults are very good at helping them to resolve disputes or

disagreements among pupils. Learning mentors help to settle pupils and make sure that they are safe and happy across the academy.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

'We respect, believe, achieve', is the academy's pledge to its pupils and families. This encapsulates the vision of the academy's new leaders, governors and staff and, rightly, places pupils' welfare and achievement at the front and centre of all their endeavours. In many respects, the Ark Chamberlain Primary Academy staff are looking forward rather than backwards, reflecting a determination to continually improve teaching and achievement and to dispense with the ineffective practices of the past. The Principal is visionary and has brought clear management structures that have greater clarity of purpose, and has 'raised the bar' considerably, having already set much higher expectations for everyone working across the academy. Staff morale is high as a result, although every member of staff recognises that there is still a lot of work to be done to help all pupils achieve as well they should.

The Principal and her new leadership team have made a good start by establishing clear roles and responsibilities. Senior leaders and staff with management roles are now much clearer about the part they should play in securing more improvement across the academy. These clear definitions of who is doing what and when provide much sharper and more coherent lines of communication between leaders, teachers and support staff. The new senior leadership team is well qualified and skilled. The vice-principal and assistant vice-principals now have more focused responsibilities for managing both the academic and pastoral aspects of the academy's work. Leaders and new governors are starting to build the capacity for sustained improvement, having already put in place more robust oversight and monitoring of teaching and learning.

The academy's action plan sets out the right priorities for improvement. The plan has clear measures of success that enable leaders and governors to gauge the impact of actions on improving teaching and learning across the academy and in all classes. Leaders' evaluations of the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement are accurate. These evaluations are now based on increasingly secure monitoring of teaching and more accurate assessments of pupils' progress and performance.

The academy's leaders and the local governing body have taken effective action to address the shortcomings in safeguarding and child protection procedures identified at the time of the previous inspection. Safeguarding procedures and policies are now effective. There are formalised and clear roles and responsibilities for staff and linked governors, with more clearly defined oversight for safeguarding, child protection and staff vetting procedures. Lines of accountability are clear and

safeguarding policies and practices are understood by all staff. Appropriate policies, regular updates and staff training are being undertaken and reviewed, including robust safety checks, risk assessments and staff vetting procedures to ensure that pupils are safe.

Middle leadership remains weak. The heads of year are not always undertaking the necessary level of scrutiny, monitoring, oversight and support that will sustain improvements to teaching in all classes across each year group. Senior leaders and governors recognise this as a major priority for improvement at this stage of the school's efforts towards removal from special measures. The recruitment of permanent and supply staff is much more robust now than previously. As a result, there are early signs that teachers with management responsibilities are starting to improve their practice. Nonetheless, there are still teachers and staff who have been responsible for managing subjects, year groups or aspects of the academy's work in the past who do not yet have the necessary skills or competence to monitor and improve teaching.

Governance has improved and is being led by a skilled Chair. The new local governing body is composed of well-qualified and skilled governors. There are presently only six governors, although plans are in place to undertake a skills audit in order to recruit more governors representing parents and the local community. The governing body meets each half term and the most recent minutes in November 2015 show that it is already challenging the academy's leaders on issues related to teaching and achievement, particularly the achievement of disadvantaged pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium.

External support

Since Ark Schools took over as the academy's sponsor it has ensured that appropriate levels of support and challenge are put in place to check that the academy is making enough progress towards the removal from special measures. The statement of action devised by the proprietor, Ark Schools, is fit for purpose and reconciles well with the academy's improvement plan. The academy's senior leaders and the local governing body are stepping up their monitoring roles and providing more systematic information about pupils' progress and teachers' performance to the Regional Director of Primaries (Birmingham) at Ark Schools. Since the last inspection in June 2015, the academy's leaders are much less reliant on external support from advisers and consultants. Support, training and mentoring are now being managed within the Ark partnership, utilising the skills and sharing the best practice available in other academies across the partnership.