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Mrs Jane Edwards
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Dear Mrs Edwards

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Heronsgate School

Following my visit to your academy on 15 January 2016, 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good academy.

The academy should take further action to:

- ensure that the impact of current and planned approaches to improve pupils' writing is rigorously monitored.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the Chief Executive of the multi-academy trust, accompanied by the Chair of the Governing Body, and a group of both senior and subject leaders. Improvement plans, the academy's own evaluation, and records of the safeguarding checks undertaken on staff were scrutinised. Short visits were made to classes in Years 3 and 4 accompanied by the headteacher, and unaccompanied visits were made to Year 6 classes where pupils' books were checked. Pupils were observed during morning break and Year 5 pupils were observed participating in a 'Victorian day'.

Context

Since the last inspection, the post of assistant headteacher responsible for improving teaching and learning has been created and filled by a current member of staff. Four new teachers have been appointed.

Main findings

You accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses in the academy when you took up your post two years ago. The previous inspection report acknowledged that you were taking the academy in the right direction. Since then, you have determinedly and systematically continued with your programme of planned changes. You have strengthened approaches that were in their infancy at the time of the last inspection. A good example of this is the way you have extended and further developed your academy's values. No opportunity is lost to reinforce them, and they are now more highly visible and better linked to pupils' rewards. The changes you are making are tangibly improving teaching, pupils' behaviour and their progress. The academy makes all the required checks on the suitability of adults to work with children and records these appropriately on a single central register.

The teaching of mathematics is now stronger. Pupils have benefited from the new approach, which focuses on ensuring that their speed and accuracy are honed. In some classes, the impact of this was seen in the confident way that pupils were able to zip through a set of problems that required reasoning and multiplication skills. Many pupils worked out that they could check their answers by employing a different method and this process further secured their understanding. The most able made good progress because the task set to challenge pupils was thoughtfully planned and thus enabled them to gain mastery of the concept.

New approaches to writing are not as well developed as those in numeracy, but are nevertheless beginning to have an impact on pupils' writing. You have sensibly included the opportunity to write at length as part of pupils' learning in different topics, such as history. This is helping pupils to structure their writing using effective links. All pupils now have a book for drafting and editing their writing in English lessons. Some teachers are ensuring that this book is used well to help pupils develop a greater understanding of the writing process. However, in some classes visited, pupils did not understand teachers' editing suggestions. Similarly, some teachers were not making thorough enough checks on whether, when editing their work, pupils made changes that were more substantial than merely correcting their mistakes. In these cases, pupils' progress in their writing was slowed.

You have successfully strengthened your leadership team by appointing a new assistant headteacher who works effectively with subject leaders. You have carefully chosen external providers to develop your subject leaders' skills and expertise. Following this training, the subject lead for mathematics has successfully implemented whole-school approaches. He is robustly monitoring how well teachers

are using these methods. You have wisely planned further training in writing for the subject lead for English. However, more thorough checks need to be made on the impact of the new approaches to writing that teachers are currently implementing.

Governance has continued to improve. The Chair of the Governing Body has rightly focused further development on those areas identified in the previous inspection report. The committee that ensures the academy makes steady progress towards being good, the 'Chair's Group', meets more frequently. It now places an even greater focus on using a range of information to monitor teaching and the progress pupils are making, especially disadvantaged pupils. The Chair of the Governing Body has had more opportunities to work with other Chairs across the trust and this has strengthened his expertise. The improvement plan provides governors with clear milestones that need to be reached at specific points in the year. You agreed that the plan does not always make it clear which members of the governing body are responsible for checking whether milestones have been reached.

External support

You have ensured that subject leaders undertake extensive training from a commercial provider brokered by the academy trust. This additional help has effectively supported your work to improve mathematics. You have wisely decided that you need to use a range of approaches to improve pupils' writing, and have therefore planned further training on teaching writing for the subject lead for English. It will be important to monitor carefully whether new approaches implemented following further training lead to improvements in pupils' writing.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the executive headteacher, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Milton Keynes council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector