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Mrs Theresa Rogers
Executive Principal
Norwich Road Academy
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Dear Mrs Rogers

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Norwich Road Academy

Following my visit to your school on 29 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 school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school 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, the local governing body 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 school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the two vice-principals, the leaders of reading, writing and mathematics, a new teacher, a representative from the Academy Transformation Trust (ATT), a new member of the local governing body, and on the telephone with the Chair of the Local Governing Body with the head of governance for ATT, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I met with the office manager to look at the single central register of checks on staff's suitability to work with children. I went into each classroom accompanied by you and the vice-principals. I looked at the recent review by ATT of the school's work and leaders' monitoring of pupils' performance.

Context

At the time of the inspection in June 2015, you were the Acting Executive Principal and you took on the permanent position from September 2015. There were some changes to staffing and the local governing body for the start of the autumn term 2015.

Main findings

The inspection in June 2015 came at a time of instability for the school but, since September 2015, the stability provided by you and the teaching staff is improving the quality of teaching and pupils' performance. The improvements that were only just starting to make a difference to pupils at the June 2015 inspection are now making a greater difference. By the end of the summer term 2015, national tests for pupils in the early years, and Years 1, 2 and 6, together with the school's assessments for pupils in each year group, show an improvement from the 2014 results. Changes in staffing, the curriculum and assessment mean that improvements continued throughout the autumn term 2015. Current information shows that pupils achieve age-appropriate expectations increasingly.

You coach leaders effectively to improve their performance. Leaders follow your example and coach the teaching staff. This approach works well to develop staff's skills and confidence. For example, you model how to use a range of information about pupils' achievements systematically and simply to make sure that strengths and weaknesses are accurately identified.

The leaders of reading, writing and mathematics now play a key part in the school's improvement. This not only makes a difference to the quality of teaching for literacy and numeracy but also frees up time for the vice-principals to do the strategic work that they need to do. As a result, the following things have happened since September 2015 and are making a difference to teaching and pupils' performance:

- Staff have clear guidelines for what must be taught so that pupils can acquire age-appropriate knowledge and skills.
- Teachers plan together in year groups so that the curriculum is consistent across each year group.
- The behaviour policy is implemented consistently and low-level disruption no longer compromises pupils' learning.
- Pupils in Year 6 are taught in three classes, providing small teaching groups, which helps pupils to fill the gaps in their prior learning successfully.
- Training for staff focuses on the areas needing the most improvement, and this, together with formal management of staff's performance, helps increase staff's understanding of, and confidence for, what must improve.
- Assessment systems were revised and provide a clear picture of pupils' achievements so that leaders and teachers can easily understand how well pupils are doing.

Although an improving picture, staff, governors and trustees know that pupils' attainment and progress are not good enough and that there is still much work to do, especially to make sure that pupils routinely make better than expected progress. The action plan reflects an appropriate long-term view for sustaining improvements across all subjects, year groups and groups of pupils, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. The plan is used well to focus leaders, governors and the trust on the most important things that must improve. As a next step, you have identified appropriately that written reports do not identify the impact of leaders' work clearly.

In preparation for an external review of governance, as recommended at the June 2015 inspection, an initial meeting took place on 14 January 2016. Some of the vacancies on the local governing body, arising as a result of the inspection, have only recently been filled. A full review is planned in the near future so that new governors have a clear understanding of how to carry out their roles and responsibilities from the very start of their appointments.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Members of the local governing body and the trust are very clear about their different strategic responsibilities. The trust provides the external support and challenge. It reviews the school's performance each month through a progress monitoring board. Minutes of the board's meetings, together with the report of the recent on-site review show appropriate and sustained challenge. The recent review by ATT was thorough and the written report evaluates the strengths and weaknesses clearly. The trust's improvement officer supported the leaders of reading, writing and mathematics recently in carrying out their strategic responsibilities. This support was welcomed and valued, and complemented the support from the vice-principals. This combined support has made a positive difference to the performance of the leaders.

In addition to the external support and challenge from the trust, you use other professionals to check the accuracy of leaders' monitoring. This includes working with advisers from Norfolk local authority and other schools within the multi-academy trust.

I am copying this letter to ATT, the Chair of the Local Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector