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9 March 2016
Mrs Vicky Hayles and Mr Jason Osprey
Firbeck Academy
Firbeck Road
Wollaton
Nottingham
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Dear Mrs Hayles and Mr Osprey

Special measures monitoring inspection of Firbeck Academy

Following my visit with Janis Warren, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 1 and 2 March 2016, 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 that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in March 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Finch

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2015

- Improve the quality of teaching, including in the early years, by:
 - using assessment more effectively to identify the particular learning needs of all pupils
 - ensuring that the work provided for the pupils is focused on meeting their particular needs
 - ensuring that the work provided for pupils builds on their prior learning and allows opportunities for them to extend their learning
 - ensuring that the work provides sufficient and appropriate challenge for all groups of pupils, in particular the most-able pupils
 - providing the pupils with precise information about how well they are doing and how they can improve, with reference to the relevant knowledge, skills and understanding
 - challenging and promoting the pupils' oracy and literacy consistently when commenting on the pupils' responses in lessons
 - establishing consistently high expectations of the pupils in relation to the presentation of their work
 - being more alert to and challenging any behaviour when pupils appear to be losing concentration or motivation
 - ensuring classroom routines and the organisation of pupils' work do not slow or interfere with learning.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including the early years, by:
 - focusing unequivocally on improving the quality of teaching
 - setting out a clear strategy and direction for improving the quality of teaching
 - ensuring that plans spell out clearly and precisely what actions will be taken to improve the quality of teaching
 - evaluating the quality of teaching incisively through the rigorous analysis of all the available evidence, including data about pupils' achievement
 - ensuring that teachers with responsibilities are enabled to make a full contribution to monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching
 - ensuring that all aspects of the academy's work are evaluated equally rigorously, including pupils' behaviour and safety.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 March 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and met with: the executive headteacher; the head of school; two members from the governing body; three members of the Nottingham University Samworth Academies Trust; leaders responsible for English, mathematics and the early years provision; and groups of pupils from Key Stages 1 and 2. Inspectors visited lessons and evaluated pupils' work. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Inspectors considered the school's most recent information on the attainment and progress of groups of pupils. Documentation relating to pupils' attendance, the behaviour and safety of pupils and arrangements for safeguarding pupils was also considered.

Context

The school continues to have extensive building work which limits the space available outside. Staffing has remained stable since the previous monitoring inspection.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The executive headteacher and head of school are working effectively to improve the quality of teaching at the school. They have planned extensive professional development and support for staff to improve the standard of teaching. In addition, they have created a positive climate for learning. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving.

The deputy headteacher has worked closely with the local authority adviser to develop a detailed action plan to improve the provision in the early years. The actions within the plan have been mostly completed. As a consequence, the outdoor area of the nursery is much improved and the quality of teaching in the Reception class is consistently good. However, the quality of provision in Nursery Year is inconsistent because the children's language skills are not being developed as well as they could be. In addition, the most-able pupils are not being sufficiently challenged.

The English and mathematics leaders show a good understanding of their subjects and lead by example in the classroom. As a result, the standard of writing is better in Years 2 and 6 and mathematical reasoning and problem solving is very well developed in Year 3. The leaders have led whole-staff training to promote initiatives for their subjects. However, they have not routinely monitored the impact of their training and, as a consequence, the pace of improvement through the school could be quicker, particularly in developing pupils' writing.

Senior leaders have worked with individual teachers to improve the quality of teaching, which has been effective. However, the general monitoring of teaching does not always focus on how well groups of pupils are achieving within the lesson. As a result, the most-able pupils are not always being challenged through high-order questioning, particularly in English.

Members of the governing body and the trust have a very good understanding of the progress the school is making. The Chair of the Governing Body, as well as the executive headteacher, have places on the trust board and communicate the progress that the school is making. In addition, two members of the trust sit in on governing body meetings. Minutes of the governing body meetings show that the governors challenge the school leaders on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. In addition, governors use the timescales that have been set within the school improvement plan to hold leaders to account. As a result, the school is improving the provision for the pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers are enthusiastic and are committed. The relationships between the adults and the pupils in the classroom are good. The classrooms have informative displays. Teachers have responded well to the training and support that has taken place. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving.

Teaching in the Reception class is lively and inspires the children to achieve well. Inspectors observed children independently composing their own extended sentences and using their phonics knowledge to write them. As a consequence, a large majority of pupils are on track to achieve the early learning goal for writing. In Nursery, children were observed creating their own patterns and using the construction apparatus independently. However, the children's language skills in Nursery are not being developed consistently to improve their vocabulary.

The teachers and teaching assistants, who support the children who are deaf, include them very well in lessons to support their learning.

Teaching in Key Stage 1 is improving and pupils are being inspired to achieve well. In Year 2, pupils were enthusiastically learning about fractions. The teacher's questioning was effective and she knew what the pupils could do and moved them on appropriately. In Year 1, pupils wrote sentences using correct punctuation and verb tense. However, pupils were not challenged by the teacher's questioning to give detailed answers and explain their understanding.

Teaching in Key Stage 2 is improving. Pupils are regularly asked to speak clearly in lessons to express their point of view. As a result, pupils are keen to participate in lessons. In Year 6, pupils are being given opportunities to write extended pieces of writing. During the inspection, pupils were observed writing a balanced argument to a high standard. In Year 3, pupils' reasoning about number and their ability to explain their thinking are well developed and pupils enjoy the challenges that are

set. Through the school, pupils told the inspectors how much they enjoy mathematics. Pupils are being motivated through the school to learn their times tables.

However, the most-able pupils are not being routinely challenged to develop their comprehension and writing skills through Key Stage 2. In addition, the spelling of the most-able pupils has not been promoted well enough because they are not asked to correct their mistakes on a regular basis.

Teachers' assessments of pupils' work are not totally reliable. As a result, the most-able pupils are not being challenged well enough in lessons. Senior leaders are aware of this issue and recently organised for teachers to moderate pupils' writing with two other schools to help support teachers to assess pupils' work accurately. Teachers found this meeting very useful. However, much more support is needed to ensure teachers are assessing pupils' work correctly across the curriculum.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Most pupils display positive attitudes to their work. Pupils are keen to do well and strive to earn a 'Firbeck pound'. Pupils are taking pride in their work; an example of this is the way they underline their dates and titles with a ruler. Pupils are keen to earn the right to use a pen in their books. Pupils are also motivated to be named in the 'golden book' and have tea with a headteacher if they have displayed good behaviour around the school. Routines for pupils to line up for assembly, end of playtimes and lunchtimes are well established and orderly. Despite the limited outdoor space, pupils were observed playing well at breaktimes and lunchtimes.

The vast majority of pupils are behaving well both in the classrooms and outside. The school's behaviour policy is applied consistently by all staff and understood by the pupils. Leaders closely track the number of incidents of low-level disruption. The latest information shows that the number of these incidents has fallen markedly. The school is working closely with a range of agencies for those pupils who have additional behavioural needs.

Overall attendance for all groups of pupils is above the national average. Although there are still a few pupils who are persistently absent, this number has decreased as the academic year has progressed. The school closely monitors attendance and punctuality and takes prompt action if concerns arise. As a result, attendance is high.

Outcomes for pupils

Children in the Reception class are making faster progress than children in Nursery. Children in Reception are doing very well with their writing. The gap between the achievement of boys and girls is narrowing rapidly from the outcomes at the end of Reception in 2015. Girls are still achieving better than boys.

In Year 2, boys are outperforming the girls in reading, writing and mathematics. Boys are also doing much better than girls in mathematics in Year 3. Girls are achieving better than boys in reading in Year 6. However, in most other subjects in the other year groups, there are no significant gaps between the achievement of boys and girls.

Disadvantaged pupils are making similar amounts of progress and achieving as well as their classmates across the school. Similarly, pupils who speak English as an additional language are doing as well as pupils whose first language is English in all year groups.

Pupils are being given opportunities to reason mathematically and solve more complex problems. In Year 6, some pupils were confidently calculating how many seconds there are in a leap year and could explain their strategy for working out the answer.

There have not been enough opportunities for pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 to write extended pieces of writing. As a result, pupils' ability to compose longer pieces of writing is weaker than it should be. The most-able pupils in particular are not producing the quality of work that they are capable of. In addition, the spelling of pupils from this group is not as proficient as it should be because they are not being regularly asked to correct their mistakes.

External support

The local authority adviser has provided good support to help improve the provision in the early years. Following the adviser's detailed observation of teaching and learning, the deputy headteacher wrote an action plan to address the issues raised. As a result, practice is improving rapidly, particularly in the Reception class. The adviser has now set new targets to continue the improvements further.

School leaders have continued the link with Westdale Junior School to support teaching and learning, particularly in Year 6. In addition, all teachers joined other staff from Westdale Junior School and Birklands Primary School to moderate the judgements of pupils' writing. This has started to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments of writing. However, more support is required to make teachers' assessments across the curriculum more reliable.

Senior leaders continue to gain valuable support from working with other senior leaders as part of the Torch Alliance. In addition, they have been able to access safer recruitment training through the alliance to further strengthen safeguarding procedures at the school.