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22 October 2015

Mrs Rachel Swaffield
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Swaffield

Special measures monitoring inspection of Gilbert Inglefield Academy

Following my visit with Richard Spencer, Associate Inspector, to your academy on 29 and 30 September 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement which 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.

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

The academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Central Bedfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the teaching of all groups of students, particularly the most-able students and disadvantaged students, so achievement rapidly improves by making sure that:
 - work is engaging and set at the right level for students of different abilities in all subjects
 - students' work is marked frequently and teachers give guidance on how students can improve their work
 - students are moved on to new work as soon as they are ready
 - all teachers insist on students presenting their work neatly and accurately
 - students' spelling, punctuation and grammar are checked in all subjects
 - work which is missed or unfinished is caught up.
- Raise achievement in mathematics by:
 - ensuring that all mathematics teachers have a good level of knowledge about the subject
 - making sure that students are given sufficient time to practise particular skills
 - providing the most-able students with regular opportunities to study more complicated mathematical problems
 - making sure that practical activities are well matched to the key skills and concepts that students are learning.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - governors develop the skills required to carefully monitor the impact of the pupil premium and other funding, and robustly hold the academy to account for the quality of its teaching and students' achievement
 - the mathematics action plan is rapidly implemented and regularly monitored for its impact on students' achievement
 - students' achievement is checked in detail so that any underachievement or differences between the achievement of different groups of students can be tackled quickly
 - subject leaders are sufficiently skilled to check achievement and teaching in their areas and that they are held to account for how this information is used to secure improvements
 - the attendance of different groups of students is regularly checked, particularly for disadvantaged students

- all students feel confident that any bullying will be dealt with quickly.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 29 and 30 September 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, evaluated the latest Key Stage 2 results and held meetings with the headteacher, nominated senior and middle leaders, three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a group of pupils. The inspectors spent most of their time observing teaching; almost all teachers were observed and spoken with during the visit.

Context

Since the last visit, six teachers have left the academy, some of whom worked part time. Two full-time permanent appointments in mathematics and one temporary teacher started in September. The academy uses specialist staff from the adjacent upper school to teach some subjects, such as German and drama.

The governing body has filled two of its vacancies noted at the visit and is in the process of recruiting another governor. Most of the governors have joined since September 2014. The governing body is working closely with the governing bodies of two neighbouring schools to explore options to create a formal federation of local academies.

Outcomes for pupils

Standards are rising in English and mathematics. Pupils' attainment in the most recent assessments at the end of Key Stage 2 showed marked improvement when compared with the previous year, both overall and specifically in mathematics, where standards had dipped in 2014. Although unvalidated, the academy's 2015 results are likely to be close to the national figures. The proportions of pupils reaching the expected Level 4 in reading, writing and mathematics rose this year, with proportions attaining the higher Level 5 in each subject increasing markedly. These increases reflect the better progress made by pupils in Years 5 and 6 and the success of the systematic intervention implemented by the English and mathematics departments since January, including booster sessions outside school hours.

Despite these encouraging improvements, two aspects of attainment remain cause for concern:

- pupils' scores in spelling, punctuation and grammar are below average and lag well below the teachers' assessments of writing
- the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates at the end of Key Stage 2 has widened because they made too little progress last year. Very few pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds achieved the higher Level 5 in either reading or mathematics.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching is improving, particularly in mathematics, but the quality of pupils' learning varies widely, both between subjects and between different classes in the same subject. At times, pupils make excellent progress but, too often, the pace of learning is pedestrian and work lacks sufficient focus or challenge. Pupils' learning is most rapid when teachers set high expectations of what pupils will achieve, how hard they will work and how they will behave. The most effective teaching conveys calm authority but also pays close attention to detail so that pupils know that they must be precise, whether this is with their pronunciation, their 'times tables', chords or spelling of key terms. Where teachers have established a positive climate for learning, they are able to maintain a rapid pace and encourage all the pupils to join in and work hard.

Several aspects of teaching have been strengthened. Teachers' planning is more sharply focused on the outcomes that pupils should and could achieve and their marking of pupils' work is better. Teachers have successfully implemented the new marking policy and this is having a positive impact on pupils' learning and progress. Teaching assistants are generally well deployed. On this visit, their support was observed to be effective because their time in lessons was well planned and sensibly used.

Despite these improvements, the pace of learning slackens when there are weaknesses in teachers' planning or their management of learning. In some lessons, teachers prepared interesting activities and used good resources but did not direct pupils skilfully enough, so key learning points were overlooked. Teachers sometimes did not model what they wanted to see or explain tasks clearly enough, so pupils were not clear about what they needed to do. In several lessons, the pace of learning was simply too leisurely.

The academy's method of differentiated planning, which sets out what 'all', 'most' or 'some' pupils will achieve by the end of the lesson, tends to set expectations too low. Quite often, after just a few minutes, 'all' pupils can do what is set out for 'most' or 'some' of the class. This is not an issue when teachers use their questioning to nimbly assess pupils' understanding and redirect their learning, but in several lessons teachers did not challenge pupils and the pace of learning was slow. Some teachers started lessons at too leisurely a pace or set too many undemanding tasks which did not develop pupils' skills, knowledge or understanding, particularly after they had completed the first one or two exercises. Some lessons, for example in science, physical education (PE) and English, created an illusion of productive learning because pupils were either working quietly on low-level tasks or energetically on an activity that provided little challenge.

The quality of teaching in mathematics, a key priority for improvement, has strengthened significantly. Teachers share ideas well and use their specialist subject

knowledge to set work that stretches pupils, including the most-able pupils. The department is developing a good range of resources and a repertoire of activities to ensure that teaching meets the needs of different groups. Staff have sensibly reviewed their approaches to teaching in order to develop pupils' skills in mathematical problem-solving and to give pupils opportunities to tackle more complicated mathematical problems.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are friendly, polite and well mannered; their behaviour in assembly was impeccable. They conduct themselves well and have embraced the recent changes: they wear their new uniform with pride, enjoy the healthy competition of the new house system and follow new routines sensibly. Increased levels of staff supervision during breaks and lunchtimes, and new procedures for the start of lessons, have contributed to a calm and orderly start to the new school year, although individual pupils present challenging behaviour because they struggle to make the right choices. The academy's own records show that serious incidents, including bullying, have reduced over the last six months. Pupils acknowledge the improvements and say they feel safe in the academy, but they were quick to point out that lessons are still too often interrupted by silly behaviour. The new behaviour policy, issued in September, has been introduced to improve the consistency of teachers' behaviour management in lessons. Evidence from this inspection indicates that teachers are not applying the stepped sanctions consistently, and pupils are sceptical about the effectiveness of the new behaviour system.

In lessons, pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning still vary considerably and, despite the new behaviour policy, closely reflect the teachers' different expectations and the quality of teaching. When the level of challenge and the pace of learning is slow, pupils are inclined not to exert themselves and do not take enough care or precision with their work. This is reflected, for example, in careless copying from the board, untidy handwriting, incomplete work or idle chatter when working in pairs or small groups. Conversely, where teaching is demanding, pupils respond enthusiastically and sustain their efforts impressively well. Boys in Year 7 worked very hard on their rugby skills in their PE lesson because the teacher had set such high expectations; pupils in Year 7 sustained their concentration exceptionally well in French because the teacher maintained such a sharp focus and brisk pace; and pupils in Year 5 were engrossed in their mathematics because the activities were so well prepared and excellent classroom routines had been so well instilled.

Attendance remains below the national average, particularly the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. However, more rigorous procedures are in place to check absence, to analyse the attendance of different groups of pupils and to support and challenge those families whose children struggle to maintain good attendance.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher models strong and effective leadership by setting high expectations and holding staff accountable for the quality of their work. Most of the changes since the last inspection have been driven by the headteacher. Revisions to the development plan provide clear and measurable actions to steer the academy's recovery and improvement.

Improvements in both mathematics and English are well led. In mathematics, for example, revisions to the curriculum, changes to the way pupils are grouped and improvements in lesson planning and assessment have significantly strengthened the quality of teaching and pupils' learning. This improvement has been effectively underpinned by staff training. Importantly, the impact of these changes is systematically reviewed with regular scrutiny of pupils' work and observations of teaching, so that further improvements can be quickly made. The improved results at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2015 are testimony to the stronger subject leadership in the academy, particularly in mathematics.

Other senior and middle leaders are beginning to implement necessary improvements. As yet, though, too many of the planned developments are being managed rather than led, and rely too heavily on direction from above or external guidance. Developments, such as whole-school improvements in teaching, have not been critically reviewed by senior leaders or middle leaders to check their impact on outcomes for specific groups of pupils. Moreover, the leadership of subjects other than mathematics and English is not yet effective because staff here have not regarded raising standards in their subjects as a key priority. One evident weakness is the weak focus on pupils' reading and writing across other subjects. Teachers sometimes do not model good speaking and accurate grammar, spelling and punctuation, and so good literacy is not reinforced or developed among pupils.

Notwithstanding this criticism, this visit provided positive evidence of improvement. Inspectors observed a lot of lively and well-planned teaching that enthused pupils and encouraged them to work hard. Some teachers are adventurous in trying different activities and using new resources to improve the pupils' learning. At this stage, some strategies are more successful than others. Marking has been a more obvious success. The new approach, highlighting strengths and priorities for pupils to improve their work, gives pupils clear guidance on how to raise standards.

The governing body continues to strengthen, with new governors bringing useful expertise and experience. Governors are fulfilling their roles more confidently. They ask for and receive helpful information that enables them to hold the academy to account more effectively, and are gathering some evidence for themselves through a well-structured programme of monitoring.

External support

As a standalone academy, leaders have had to find external support from consultants and through links with other schools and academies. This commissioned advice and guidance has been both helpful and effective, although targeted support for teaching has been too recently implemented to have had any significant impact. The engagement of a school improvement partner provides sound evaluation of the quality of teaching and the impact of improvements.

Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection, the proprietors have taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose.