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Mr Janis Zakis
Principal
Freeman's Endowed Church of England Junior Academy
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Dear Mr Zakis

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Freeman's Endowed Church of England Junior Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 22 March 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 second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 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:

- strengthen the process for reviewing the progress of pupils at risk of falling behind, and those that have fallen behind, so that teachers and teaching assistants take effective action to ensure that they catch up
- improve teaching to that of the best so that pupils' behaviour and progress are consistently strong across all classes.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the vice principal, the administrator of the single central record, subject leaders, the trust, the diocesan school improvement partner and members of the local governing body. I evaluated the academy improvement plan with you. I observed the pupils at breaktime and I accompanied you and the vice principal on short visits to lessons. The vice principal and I looked at a sample of books with the English and mathematics leaders. We reviewed pupil performance information for 2015 and for pupils currently at the school. Prior to the inspection, I reviewed previous inspection reports, the academy's website and published performance information.

Context

Four governors have joined the governing body since the monitoring inspection in July 2015 and the governing body is now complete. The previous vice principal stepped down at the end of the autumn term 2015 to return to class teaching and her successor took up post at the beginning of the spring term 2016.

The academy is a stand-alone academy, and as such, governors and leaders arrange support from external providers and schools. Governors are working with the Diocese of Peterborough to provide support and challenge to leaders and have recently appointed an experienced school improvement adviser to act as the academy's improvement partner.

Main findings

Leaders have taken effective action to make the improvements set out in the monitoring visit letter in July 2015 to improve the post-Ofsted improvement plan. You could improve the plan further by sharpening success criteria to include improved pupil outcomes.

A national leader of governance completed the external review of governance in the summer term. Governors and leaders have acted effectively on the recommendations of the review. They have formulated a governance improvement plan and it is on track to be fully implemented by October 2016.

Governors are better informed about the performance of the academy than previously, and now know the academy well. The appointment of an experienced clerk has enabled governors to be better prepared and has given them confidence. Consequently, they are also much more challenging of academy leaders for the standards achieved by the pupils and the effective implementation of the academy improvement plan. The development of a scrutiny committee to review how effectively school leaders carry out the academy improvement plan is a positive step

forward. Governors should formally report the work of this committee to the full governing body.

Leaders and governors also commissioned a national leader of education to review the pupil premium grant. The findings of this report have been included in the revised academy improvement plan. Governors have an improved understanding of the provision that leaders and teachers make for disadvantaged pupils and the standards those pupils achieve.

Leaders track pupils' achievements and review their progress termly. This enables them to support and challenge teachers and teaching assistants about the progress that pupils make. However, leaders recognise that these discussions need to be more rigorous if they are to ensure that pupils make good progress. Pupils' performance information is collected every half term, which gives leaders additional opportunities to discuss with teachers the achievements of those pupils who are at risk of making insufficient progress. These discussions should align with the meetings teachers have with teaching assistants to evaluate the impact of the additional support that pupils receive. Leaders must arrange these meetings in order to ensure that teachers and teaching assistants enable pupils who have fallen behind to catch up, and to support those at risk of falling behind.

Leaders use a range of strategies to monitor the quality of teaching, including lesson observations, looking at books, reviewing planning and evaluating pupils' performance information. As a result, they have a well-informed view of teaching, including where expectations and practice need to improve. Leaders need to act on this knowledge to ensure that all pupils make good progress.

Leaders are taking effective action to ensure that pupils are challenged. They have introduced a layered approach to learning that gives pupils the opportunity to learn through progressively more challenging tasks: bronze, silver, gold or platinum. Pupils were keen to describe this to me and explained that sometimes they choose the task and at other times the teacher directs them.

A significant minority of teachers are relatively new to the profession and to the role of subject leader. Therefore, they need leaders to provide them with management, guidance and professional development. This will enable them to have an accurate view of standards of teaching and pupil outcomes in their subjects and will better equip them to provide support to colleagues so that pupils can make consistently rapid progress in a wide range of subjects.

At the end of Key Stage 2 in 2015, the proportions of pupils making expected progress was in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the proportions making more than expected progress in reading and writing was below the national average and close to the national average in mathematics. This was because too few of the most-able pupils made good

progress. Pupils currently in Year 6 are making similar progress to 2015 in writing although there is some evidence to suggest that more pupils are making good progress in reading and mathematics.

Pupils' behaviour at breaktime was good. They played well together and were considerate of each other in a congested space. Pupils were friendly and keen to talk with me. They told me that behaviour was good at the academy but that if anyone does not behave well then teachers deal with them promptly. Behaviour in lessons was inconsistent. In most lessons it was good. Adults had high expectations of pupils' behaviour, pupils listened attentively and engaged in independent or group learning tasks quickly and wholeheartedly. However, in some classes, noise levels were high, adults talked over pupils and pupils did not settle to their work promptly.

External support

The new improvement adviser has a good understanding of the academy. She has provided effective support to the academy in the short time she has been in post. I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Peterborough, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Derek Myers

Her Majesty's Inspector