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4 May 2016

Mr Matthew Vickers
Principal
Outwood Primary Academy Darfield
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Dear Mr Vickers

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Outwood Primary Academy Darfield

Following my visit to your school on 22 April 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 May 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and the trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with yourself, the executive principal and the previous head of school to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with four middle leaders with responsibility for English, mathematics, special educational needs and early years. I visited all classrooms, talked with pupils and looked at pupils' work in books.

Context

The previous executive principal left the academy in July 2015, following a period of absence. The previous head of school took over the role in an acting capacity in

May 2015, immediately after the Ofsted inspection, and became substantive head of school in September 2015. She has since taken up a role in another school. You were appointed to the school as principal on 4 April 2016.

There has been considerable staff turnover since the previous inspection. Six teachers have left the school. Four have been replaced with permanent teachers and two long-term supply teachers are in place. Appointments have already been made so that, from September, all classes will be taught by permanent members of staff.

Responsibility for the school passed from Navigate Academies Trust to Outwood Grange Academies Trust (OGAT) on 1 April 2016. There are currently no governors as the local board was dissolved when Darfield transferred from Navigate Academies Trust to OGAT. The responsibility for governance currently lies with the chief executive of the academy trust. The trust has begun to recruit a local board of governors to begin their duties in June 2016.

Main findings

A thorough evaluation undertaken by OGAT shows that it has a full understanding of the needs of Darfield Academy. Plans to introduce schemes to support the delivery of phonics (letters and the sounds that they make), mathematics, physical education and some other subject areas are well underway. Suitable training programmes have been identified to help staff to develop subject and leadership expertise. The enthusiasm emanating from new senior leaders and longer-serving staff members is tangible; the school is united in its 'can do' attitude and utterly convinced it can make a difference to the lives of Darfield pupils.

Leadership in the school is improving. Leaders of English and mathematics, now supported by knowledgeable specialist teachers from OGAT, are beginning to take greater responsibility for their subjects but the development and support they have been able to offer to teachers has had less impact thus far. Consequently, you are ensuring that teachers have opportunities to observe good practice in other schools in order to continue to improve teaching at the school. The leader of early years is successfully ensuring a vibrant and purposeful setting through which children can effectively learn the skills they need to prepare them for Year 1. Leadership since 1 April 2016 is much strengthened through the experience, ability and regular presence of the new executive principal, who oversees education of pupils at five primary academies. He is very ably supported by you as the new principal, responsible for leading and developing teaching and learning in the school from day to day.

Teachers' ability to assess pupils' work accurately, and to make effective use of assessment to plan next steps in pupils' learning, has improved since the time of the inspection despite a number of false starts trialling different assessment systems. Under the guidance of the trust's specialist teachers, teachers are rapidly acquiring

the knowledge and skills they need to identify how well pupils' attainment compares to national expectations. They are also identifying and planning lessons to plug gaps in pupils' understanding. As a result of leaders' work to check how confident pupils felt about their learning, learning objectives and steps for success were introduced to all lessons.

A new marking policy was introduced in May 2015. The impact of this was to ensure that all pupils understood what they were learning and were able to judge their own progress. Marking of pupils' books has been regular and is helping pupils, particularly in mathematics, to improve their work. Leaders acknowledge that more could be done to help pupils to improve their writing.

Work in books shows that teachers are now planning series of lessons that allow pupils to deepen and develop their skills in mathematics. Pupils say that they really enjoy mathematics lessons. Results in school show that pupils are generally achieving better progress in mathematics than in reading or writing. However, leaders recognise that some pupils' current attainment for their age is not yet high enough. In response, leaders have reorganised the school day to release teachers during assembly times to help those pupils in danger of falling behind to catch up.

Urgent action has successfully raised the profile of reading across the school. Reading corners have been introduced into every classroom and a bright and well-stocked library has been installed. Dedicated times of the day purely for reading have been instigated. Leaders have introduced 'reading buddies' so that pupils of different ages enjoy sharing books together. As a consequence, reading has become a regular and enjoyable part of the school day.

Work to improve attendance began in earnest following the last inspection. Leaders have conveyed the importance of good attendance to pupils and parents and as a consequence attendance is now broadly in line with national averages. Although it is much improved, some pupils frequently miss school and the academy is working more closely with families to help pupils attend regularly and on time.

External support

The previous head of school was supported through the appointment of an external leadership consultant. The consultant worked alongside middle leaders to develop their ability to monitor and evaluate standards in their subjects effectively. The subject knowledge of teachers continues to be developed through their attendance at primary subject network leaders meetings led by OGAT.

The new executive principal has introduced high expectations and a crystal-clear vision to the academy. This is reflected in the enthusiasm expressed by both staff and pupils about changes that are already improving the quality of learning going on in classrooms.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Barnsley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Butcher
Her Majesty's Inspector