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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Heather Widdup
Academy Director
Retford Oaks Academy
Babworth Road
Retford
Nottinghamshire
DN22 7NJ

Dear Mrs Widdup

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Retford Oaks Academy

Following my visit to your school on 21 October 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 second 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. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in May 2015, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the academy director and the executive principal, with leaders responsible for mathematics, representatives of the academy trust of which the school is a part, and with representatives of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited the learning resource centre and spoke there with pupils and with members of staff. I looked at the latest information held by the school about the achievement of pupils. I looked at safeguarding and behaviour records.

Main findings

You have continued and refined the work begun at the time of my last visit to improve the quality of teaching. The work that you do to monitor the quality of teaching shows that teaching has improved. Your information about pupils' achievement, which is the latest information available at the time of this visit, indicates that pupils are making notably better progress than previously. In particular, it indicates that disadvantaged pupils are beginning to catch up with their non-disadvantaged peers.

The information about pupils' achievement shows that differences remain between subjects in terms of how well pupils do. Senior leaders demonstrate a detailed awareness and understanding of the patterns in the information. For example, they are aware that pupils do not do as well in mathematics as in some other subjects, even though pupils' achievement in that subject has improved.

The subject leaders have identified some important factors that have had an impact on pupils' achievement. They are taking appropriate actions to improve pupils' achievement, but not always to deal directly with the particular issues that they have identified in their subject areas.

Pupils' attendance has improved. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved at a rate similar to that of other pupils. That means, however, that disadvantaged pupils' attendance rates are not catching up with those of the other pupils at the school.

Staff have been updated recently about the latest government guidance on safeguarding pupils. You work closely with relevant local agencies to deal with safeguarding issues when they arise. The school's policies and procedures for reporting and recording safeguarding matters are operated carefully. Any concerns are followed up promptly, rigorously and robustly. Your records, and comments by the external agencies with which you work, show that any actions that are necessary are carried out. The few instances of bullying recorded by the school have, similarly, been dealt with thoroughly.

The school has in place systems that manage the way that pupils access the internet. In addition, you have set out clear rules about the use of the internet and other forms of information technology and have published them in various places for pupils, staff and parents. On occasions when there have been breaches of the security systems, accidentally or otherwise, you have dealt with them appropriately, including by contacting parents and appropriate external agencies.

You provide pupils with planned opportunities to learn about appropriate use of the internet and information technology. The pupils with whom I spoke were aware of the potential issues. They told me that the school's security systems generally keep them safe. For example, they pointed out to me how the systems stop them from getting access to some social media websites. They were not quite so clear and

precise in explaining the school's rules for using information technology.

You make sure that the security systems are improved after problems come to light. You do not, however, make as much use as possible of the information that you collect about how the internet is being used in school, in order to refine the security systems.

The governing body maintains effective oversight of pupils' achievement and the school's work to safeguard pupils. It is prepared to challenge senior leaders and demonstrates tenacity in seeing matters through to a conclusion.

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

The academy trust has sustained the close working relationships with the school that I noted on my previous visit. The support provided continues to be instrumental in the improvements that are increasingly evident.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Moss
Her Majesty's Inspector