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Mrs Sarah Sears
Principal
Warwick Academy
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Dear Mrs Sears

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Warwick Academy

Following my visit to your school on 16 November 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 June 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in June 2016, 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 section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other leaders, the chair of the governing body and representatives of the Education Fellowship Trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan. I met with a group of teachers and the subject leaders for English and mathematics. I also held meetings with groups of pupils from Year 5 and Year 6. I visited the early years provision with you and we observed learning in a range of classes in key stages 1 and 2.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, there have been significant changes to staffing. You became the substantive principal of the school in September having joined the school in April 2016 as joint interim principal. Eleven teachers left the school at the end of the summer term and eight teachers joined the school in September 2016.

Main findings

You recognise that the results from the key stage 2 national tests in 2016 were poor, reflecting the slow progress the Year 6 pupils made in their time at the school. Attainment was particularly low in reading and mathematics and significantly below average in writing. While pupils' attainment was close to the national average in spelling, it was well below average in grammar and punctuation. Disadvantaged pupils achieved equally poorly. These results reflect the scale of the task that you and your staff face in improving the quality of education provided by the school to be good by the time of the next section 5 inspection.

As in previous years, pupils' attainment was better in key stage 1 than in key stage 2, particularly in mathematics. Higher proportions of Year 1 pupils met the expected standard in the national phonics screening check than average, in line with the good achievement in phonics at the school seen in previous years.

At the time of the section 5 inspection, you had been at the school for less than a term and had little time to make the changes needed to improve the school. Building on the inspection's findings, you and your team have put in place the systems and strategies necessary for the school to improve. A suitable electronic data management system is now in place, for example. This is enabling teachers and senior leaders to monitor pupils' attainment much more easily and closely than before. You have also made significant changes to the curriculum to ensure it provides greater breadth and balance than before. The pupils I met with said they are now enjoying their lessons more, partly because of the wider range of topics they study.

The early years provision is much improved. You have provided the direction and support that staff needed. They are becoming more confident and skilled in planning activities which engage children well and build on their previous achievements. The children are benefiting from a much more stimulating learning environment than before.

These improvements have been accompanied by the joined-up approach to assessment and planning that you have introduced. Teachers now routinely make effective use of assessment to inform their teaching. Through their daily evaluations of the work of different pupils in each class, teachers are able to tailor subsequent learning to ensure that any misconceptions or mistakes are tackled. This approach is proving to be particularly effective in mathematics, where it is more securely

embedded than in English. Year 6 pupils, for example, receive additional teaching in small groups to tackle gaps in their knowledge identified by their teachers through regular testing. Though significant gaps in pupils' mathematical knowledge remain, these strategies are beginning to make a difference.

You have introduced more rigour to the performance management of staff, which previously was weak. While teachers feel well supported, they know they will be held to account for their pupils' progress. The teachers I met with said that they welcome the increased rigour and higher expectations you have brought to the school. Your evaluation of the quality of teaching is accurate. You know that while teaching is improving, it is still not consistently good enough to make up for pupils' underachievement in the past. In our visits to lessons, we observed pupils working purposefully and behaving well. The work in pupils' books confirmed that teachers are making good and consistent use of the school's assessment policy to check whether pupils have made the gains expected. The pupils were enthused by the interesting topics they were studying, particularly Year 5 pupils, who were writing reports from interviews they had conducted the day before about an alien invasion. Nevertheless, the work provided is not always challenging enough in both English and mathematics, including for lower-attaining pupils as well as the most able pupils.

The significant improvements to pupils' behaviour that have been secured since the section 5 inspection have resulted in a calmer, more orderly environment than before. The pupils I met with all reported that behaviour has improved, though the pupils in Year 6 said there is still work to do to improve the behaviour of a small number of pupils. All the pupils I met with reported that bullying is much reduced. As a result, they feel safer and happier in school. Some pupils continue to be concerned about the prevalence of name-calling, however, and the instances of silly behaviour around the toilets and cloakrooms.

Governors have a realistic view of the school's current position and recognise that they have in the past accepted too many excuses about the school's underperformance. They are rightly impatient for the improvements that are being made to be quickly reflected in better outcomes for the pupils. Governors monitor the school's improvement plans effectively and are able to do so because the plans set out clearly the actions leaders are taking, their intended impact and how this will be measured in the short term and over time. It would be easier for governors to monitor the impact of the changes being made on pupils' progress, however, if the plan included the interim targets you have set for each class.

External support

The support to the school provided by the Education Fellowship Trust has not so far been effective. The school has been judged to require improvement in two consecutive section 5 inspections and pupils' attainment has not improved. Leaders from the Trust are now, rightly, taking a more 'hands-on' approach to supporting

the school. For example, a senior leader from the Trust now visits the school each week to support and challenge you and your staff. Another senior leader sits on the school's governing body. The representatives from the Trust I met with recognise the urgency with which improvements must be secured. They recognise that their longer-term strategic planning for schools across the Trust must not come at the expense of securing immediate improvements at this school. The Trust's increased support is welcomed by you and the school's governors. As with the other improvements being made, however, it is too soon to assess the difference it is making to outcomes for pupils across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector