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Mrs D Adams
Acting principal
Knottingley St Botolph's CofE Academy
Primrose Vale
Knottingley
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Dear Mrs Adams

Special measures monitoring inspection of Knottingley St Botolph's CofE Academy

Following my visit to your school on 18 to 19 January 2017, 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 that have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 2016.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I recommend that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim academy board, the director of education for the Diocese of Leeds, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wakefield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Keeler
Ofsted Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2016.

- Leaders and managers must ensure that safeguarding is effective, by:
 - responding in a timely and rigorous way to any allegations or concerns that pupils may be suffering, or are at risk of suffering, harm, and sharing information in a timely manner with the relevant authority
 - following up on any referrals made to the local authority to make sure that prompt action is taken
 - reviewing all safeguarding procedures to ensure that they meet statutory requirements, and applying safeguarding policies with rigour.
- Improve teaching so that the rate of pupils' progress improves and standards are raised, especially in writing, by:
 - checking that each pupil is making enough progress from the standard they reached at the end of the previous phase of their education
 - ensuring that all teachers challenge the most-able pupils in all subjects, so more pupils reach above average standards
 - providing teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach writing well, so that pupils' vocabulary, sentence-making skills and handwriting improve
 - ensuring all support staff are used well throughout lessons, demanding more of pupils in a wide range of subjects and making sure pupils always produce their best work.
- Improve provision in the early years, by:
 - helping more children to make more than typical progress by the time they leave the Reception class
 - making sure the assessments of children's knowledge, skills and understanding as they enter the Nursery are accurate
 - providing more purposeful and challenging opportunities for children to write across the range of provision
 - more fully involving parents in their children's learning and assessment.
- Improve pupils' behaviour, by:
 - eliminating boisterous and aggressive behaviours
 - addressing the use of any discriminatory language
 - helping those pupils who struggle to control their own behaviour to become more self-disciplined.
- Better prepare pupils for life in modern Britain by ensuring the curriculum provides more opportunities for pupils to learn about a range of cultures.
- Reduce persistent absence rates for disadvantaged pupils.

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 18 to 19 January 2017

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the acting principal, the deputy principal, representatives of the interim academy board, a representative of the diocese, the school attendance officer and leaders of mathematics and English. Meetings were also held with pupils and a group of staff. The inspector visited all classrooms together with the acting principal, to observe learning and behaviour. The trust's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated. A wide range of documentation was reviewed, including policies and records relating to safeguarding.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in May 2016, the principal and one member of staff have left the school. The current acting principal started in June 2016. In August 2016, an interim academy board replaced the governing body. The long-term intention is for the school to join a multi-academy trust but, at this stage, no decisions have been made.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The trust's statement of action makes clear what will happen over the next two years, culminating in the removal of special measures. Details as to how registered parents will be consulted and kept informed of progress are also clear. Consultations with parents have already been carried out by members of the interim board, who make themselves available on a regular basis. The school's improvement plan addresses all the weaknesses identified at the time of the previous inspection. It contains deadlines for improvements to be realised, mechanisms to monitor progress, and outcomes that are directly linked to pupils' achievement.

The acting principal has swiftly identified what needs to be done and set about improving provision in a determined and enthusiastic fashion. Senior leaders are acutely aware of the need to accelerate the pace of improvement, while also allowing sufficient time for changes to have a sustainable impact. Staff understand the school's priorities. In the main, staff welcome the opportunity to play their part in taking the school forward. There is an increasingly strong sense of teamwork emerging and this is proving to be a significant factor in helping to improve the school. It is very apparent that senior leaders are prepared to support teachers in developing their classroom skills. Similarly, they are not prepared to tolerate ineffective teaching or attitudes that reflect a reluctance to face up to the reality of what it means to be in special measures and the endeavour that is required to become a good school. This approach is commendable and therefore the school is well placed to achieve significant improvement.

An external review of governance has not materialised. This is because the trust acted promptly to remove the governing body that was in place at the time of the previous inspection. It has been replaced with an interim academy board (IAB). This has proved to be a positive move. Members of the board possess the requisite skills, knowledge and experience to support senior leaders in improving provision and raising achievement. School leaders are now challenged and held to account for the work they do and this is helping to drive the pace of change. As a result, the IAB is an integral and valuable part of the improvement process.

Most phase and subject leaders understand that they have a key role in raising pupils' achievement. In the early years provision, assessments of children's knowledge, skills and understanding as they enter the Nursery are now accurate. Steps have also been taken to involve parents more fully in their children's learning and assessment. However, overall, the pace of improvement designed to help children make more than typical progress by the time they leave the Reception class is too slow.

Leaders must not lose sight of the fact that pupils' achievement needs to rise in all subjects, not just writing. At present subject action plans do not always focus on the specific skills, knowledge and understanding that pupils need to acquire if achievement is to rise. However, despite weaknesses in the action plans, subject leaders are beginning to drive improvements. This is particularly evident in the quality and presentation of pupils' writing throughout the school, which is much improved since May 2016.

Senior leaders are reviewing the way in which they check the quality of teaching and learning to ascertain whether improvements are being implemented and making a difference to pupils' progress. A more effective system for tracking pupils' progress has been introduced. This enables senior leaders to check the progress of individuals and significant groups including the most able pupils, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The acting principal and the IAB have lost no time in improving safeguarding. All staff have received training that enables them to recognise the indicators of child abuse, neglect or harm. They now know what action to take in accordance with agreed procedures. Child protection and staff behaviour policies are in place. There is a designated lead and deputy lead for child protection. Written records are made in an appropriate and timely way and are held in secure locations. Child protection and safeguarding concerns are shared with the relevant authorities. The school is now able to respond in a prompt and rigorous way to any allegations that pupils may be suffering, or are at risk of suffering, harm. Statutory requirements are now met.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching is beginning to improve because senior leaders are in the process of raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly the most able pupils. They are also making staff aware of what constitutes good practice through professional development and a range of monitoring procedures. Above all, school leaders are prepared to challenge ineffective teaching and act to resolve it. While teaching is better than in May 2016 it is still not consistently good across all year groups and all subjects, and this inhibits progress.

In the past teachers and teaching assistants have not been given the direction and support needed to develop and sustain good practice which results in high standards. This is changing, and to their credit many staff are responding positively to the expectations and changes being introduced by the new leadership. The quality and quantity of pupils' writing and the presentation of work have significantly improved since the previous inspection. Furthermore, improved behaviour management and a stimulating learning environment are helping to promote and encourage the learning of different groups. Teaching assistants are becoming facilitators as opposed to observers of learning. This is evident during lessons through the quality of their questioning and explanations that help pupils to make progress.

Some teachers are identifying pupils' misconceptions during lessons and are taking immediate action to address them. Senior leaders acknowledge that the accuracy of mid-year assessments to check pupils' progress as they move through the school is variable. This is being rectified through staff training as well as regular independent moderation.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Staff, pupils, parents, and visitors to school agree that this is the case. During the inspection, there were no incidents of boisterous behaviour observed or use of discriminatory language. Incident logs maintained by the school showed a marked decrease in referrals.

Senior leaders took swift action at the beginning of the autumn term to review the behaviour management policy. Expectations as to what is and what is not acceptable are clear to both pupils and adults. Incentives as well as sanctions have been introduced and pupils have responded enthusiastically to this initiative. The most important development is that all adults, whether they be teachers, teaching assistants or midday staff, adhere to the policy. This has resulted in a consistent and fair approach to behaviour management which pupils recognise and value.

The learning mentor has made a major contribution to improving pupils' behaviour. This has resulted in raising pupils' self-esteem and confidence, and most importantly

helping them to manage their frustrations and emotions. The improvement in pupils' behaviour has made a marked difference in their attitudes towards learning during lessons and this is beginning to be reflected in improved progress.

Leaders have taken steps to better prepare pupils for life in modern Britain by ensuring that the curriculum provides more opportunities for pupils to learn about a range of cultures. Pupils can talk enthusiastically and knowledgeably about a range of world religions and cultures they have studied. Pupils' attitudes and views of the world are enhanced through carefully planned assemblies that promote respect, the rule of law, democracy, and individual liberty.

The school has tried hard to reduce the persistent absence rates of disadvantaged pupils. Immediate checks on absence, attendance incentives for pupils and families, the promotion of a breakfast club, an increase in opportunities for parents to be more involved with their children's learning and home visits by the school attendance officer are just some of the actions taken by the school. Despite the work of the school the level of persistent absence remains a concern which senior leaders are determined to reduce.

Outcomes for pupils

There has been an inconsistent picture of pupils' progress over time, because for some years there has been too much variability in the quality of teaching. Pupils generally perform better in mathematics than writing and reading, but that does not mean to say that there is no room for improvement in mathematics. The proportion of Year 1 pupils who attained the expected level in phonics has exceeded the national average for the past two years. By the end of Year 2 in 2016, pupils' attainment was in line with the national average in writing, and just above in reading and mathematics. However, not enough pupils achieved a higher level of understanding in each subject compared to pupils nationally. In key stage 2, pupils' progress was not significantly below that of other pupils nationally overall. This was, and is still, due to pupils making greater progress in upper key stage 2 as opposed to consistently good progress throughout the key stage. If teaching was to be good across the school, outcomes would be higher. There is room for improvement in the progress made by pupils who were falling behind at the end of Year 2 in reading.

A series of lesson observations undertaken during the inspection saw pupils demonstrating extremely positive attitudes to their learning. They were engaged in their work, listening carefully to their teachers, and working collaboratively with their peers. A scrutiny of books across the school showed significantly improved presentation and quality of writing across a range of subjects, including science, history and geography. The recent improvements in leadership and management, teaching and learning and behaviour have yet to be reflected in end of key stage outcomes. However, there are encouraging signs both in relation to teaching and pupils' progress that suggest the trajectory of improvement is upward.

External support

The support and challenge provided by the diocese has been effective since the previous inspection. The decision to remove the governing body and replace it with an interim academy board following the previous inspection has proved to be a turning point. By appointing the acting principal, the IAB and the diocese have ensured that there has been a swift and effective response to the areas of improvement. The school has also benefited from the support and challenge of the diocesan school adviser and the local authority safeguarding officer.