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20 July 2017

Mrs Hayley Scargill
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Dear Mrs Scargill

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Victoria Primary Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 3 July 2017, 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 first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and representatives of the Hatton Academies Trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good academy.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders and representative of the trust, including the chief executive officer, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. We observed learning in classes in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2. We looked at a range of pupils' work in books. I evaluated your plans for improvement and considered documentation relating to your checks on the quality of teaching.

Main findings

You have a clear vision for the school, and your drive and determination are evident. Since the last inspection, your senior leaders have developed into an effective team and they support you well. They share your ambition to support pupils to achieve their best.

You and representatives from the trust have an accurate view of the school's current effectiveness. School development plans are sharply focused on what the school needs to do to improve, and you have taken swift and effective action to address the areas for development identified at the last inspection. Leaders spoke of how the school's development plan enables them to lead effectively, giving clear and precise information to help them to do their job.

The school is a calm and orderly place where pupils behave well. This is because you have reviewed your procedures for improving pupils' behaviour and all staff have clear expectations that pupils will behave well. You have adopted a consistent 'zero tolerance' approach to lessons being disrupted by poor behaviour. Consequently, pupils are respectful to each other and to their teachers. Furthermore, they are polite and friendly to visitors. The large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, agree that pupils behave well at Victoria Primary Academy.

In addition to teachers' expectations that pupils will behave well in lessons, teachers have worked hard to plan activities that challenge and motivate pupils. Staff have received training on 'What does challenge look like?' Your staff are clear that challenge is for all pupils, including the most able pupils. As a result, the great majority of pupils are better engaged in lessons and making clear progress. This is evidenced by work in books, school performance information and observations of learning. However, as you and your leaders are aware, this is not yet consistent.

The performance management of teachers is robust, and teachers are held to account for the progress of pupils. Where teaching is less strong, you and your leaders have put into place focused support to improve the quality of teaching. Teachers are allocated a mentor from the senior leadership team. Together, they devise a programme of support that is tailored to meet the teacher's individual professional development needs. Teachers welcome this support, and the school has a positive culture that promotes continued staff professional development.

You and other leaders have ensured that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is more closely monitored. You are aware of the need to evaluate the impact of the pupil premium funding more sharply, and you make regular checks on the additional support provided to these pupils. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are making similar gains in learning to other pupils. This was evident when we compared the work in books of disadvantaged pupils against non-disadvantaged pupils.

Following the last inspection, you were asked to develop the work of teaching assistants so that they have a greater impact on pupil progress. Our visits to classrooms confirmed that, in most cases, teaching assistants are deployed well by class teachers and subsequently make positive contributions to learning. Where teachers and teaching assistants work well together, teaching assistants are given clear and specific direction to enable them to support pupils' learning. Teaching assistants ask questions that encourage pupils to think for themselves and help pupils to stay on task. However, we observed teaching assistants not making a positive contribution to learning during carpet sessions. This is because they were acting as observers of learning while the teacher was talking and, consequently, were not helping to move learning on. This is an area for development which you and representatives of the trust have already identified. You have plans in place to further develop the effectiveness of teaching assistants.

In the early years, work in children's books clearly shows that children are making good progress from their starting points. Improvements to the quality of teaching and to the provision are having an impact on raising standards. The early years leader has ensured that key assessment information is displayed around the setting. This supports adults to intervene in children's play to move their learning on. In addition, adults model learning well and, as a result, children make better rates of progress than previously.

External support

The school is a member of the Hatton Academies Trust and receives support from the head of primary to develop the capacity of leadership and to support school improvement planning. The school has also worked with a specialist leader of education from a teaching school alliance to improve standards in the early years.

The support has contributed to the development of effective leadership and bringing about improvements in the areas identified at the previous inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Richardson

Her Majesty's Inspector