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Mrs Sarah Sadler
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Dear Mrs Sadler

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Woolden Hill Primary School

Following my visit to your academy on 30 October 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 May 2017. 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 recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good academy.

The academy should take further action to ensure that:

- the advisory board and the multi-academy trust are provided with information about what proportions of pupils are attaining a greater depth of understanding across different groups and cohorts
- the advisory board and the trust are given appropriate information regarding the impact of the last year's spending of the pupil premium, along with information about how leaders are spending this year's funding, and that by the end of November 2017, this information is available on the academy's website.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with yourself and the subject leaders for English and mathematics. I also met with the chair of the advisory board, the head of governance for the Discovery Schools Academy Trust, one of the trust's coordinators for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the trust's cluster leader, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the leaders' improvement planning and undertook a scrutiny of workbooks from pupils of different ages. I also toured the academy with you to see lessons taking place in all year groups. I checked that the academy's records of safeguarding checks meet requirements.

Context

The academy has appointed a new coordinator for English from the start of this term. Leaders have also appointed a teacher who will be jointly responsible for mathematics. Currently, she is solely responsible for the leadership of this subject, as the existing subject leader is on maternity leave. The headteacher no longer has direct responsibility for the coordination of support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This role is now being undertaken by a teacher who also fulfils this function at other schools in the trust.

Main findings

You, senior leaders, the academy advisory board and the trust are working closely together to make swift progress against the key areas for improvement. You have produced a comprehensive development plan that sets out clear actions against each of these areas, along with when these will take place. This plan also gives effective criteria by which the advisory board and trust can measure the success of each action.

You are providing the advisory board and trust with considerably more detailed data on pupils' achievement than was the case at the last inspection. They now receive information about the proportions of pupils in each year group who are attaining the standards expected for their age, along with the proportions of pupils who are making the gains you expect of them. You also supply them, separately, with the same information about disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is helping the board to ask more relevant questions about the performance of specific groups of pupils who are not making the progress they should. You do not, however, yet supply the advisory board and trust with information about the proportions of pupils who are attaining a greater depth of understanding. As a result, these bodies cannot rigorously monitor the progress of the most able pupils.

The subject leaders for English and mathematics are helping you to make sure that they and their colleagues adjust their planning to take account of any pupils who

are not making sufficient gains. Staff identify those pupils who are falling behind, so that they can put additional support in place, or different teaching approaches, in order for these pupils to catch up. As both subject leaders are new to their posts, you are giving them assistance to understand their roles and to become proficient. For example, you have enrolled them as members of the trust's 'professional learning collaborative'. They then meet with, and learn from, experienced subject leaders in other schools. In addition, leaders undertake surveys of pupils' attitudes towards the subjects for which they are responsible. This helps them to understand in which ways pupils like to learn and any particular areas of difficulties they have. The trust is giving subject leaders further support by helping them to understand performance information and to assist them in delivering staff meetings to support those colleagues who feel less confident or who are new to the profession.

Members of the multi-academy trust have re-written the scheme of delegation in order to clarify which responsibilities they devolve directly to the advisory board and which lie elsewhere. They have written this scheme in a transparent and detailed manner, which helps you and your leadership team know what information you need to present to whom, and who will hold you responsible for the different aspects of your role. For example, the advisory board reviews the performance of pupils, whereas the cluster governing board compares achievement of Woolden Hill's pupils with those in other local schools in the trust. The cluster's executive leader, who is a national leader of education, reviews the quality and accuracy of the performance information you supply. He quality assures the monitoring processes you use and, in addition, is responsible for approving the plans you write to raise achievement further. Because of the clearer structure of responsibility, more detailed performance information and effective training for its members, the advisory board is quickly improving its understanding of where pupils are making rapid gains, along with where they are not, and the reasons for this. For example, the chair of the board was able to explain confidently how and why the proportion of pupils in Year 1 who satisfied the phonics screening check in the last academic year had fallen, compared to the previous year. He was able to set out how you have implemented swift action to ensure that better phonics teaching is taking place this year. Although you have provided the advisory board and trust with information about the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils, you agree that you have not yet given them details of the impact of the spending of the pupil premium last year, along with how you are spending this year's allocation. This information is also not currently on the academy's website. You plan to address both of these issues shortly. However, at present, neither parents nor members of the advisory board can see how successful different elements of the expenditure were in accelerating the progress of disadvantaged pupils in each key stage, including that of the most able disadvantaged.

Teaching is improving. Teachers are increasingly checking pupils' understanding during lessons, and at their end. They complete detailed records of the different skills that each pupil has learned and use these to plan more effectively what they will teach next. This is resulting in work being better matched to pupils' different

needs. Pupils said that they are encouraged to move on to work that is more difficult if they can demonstrate that they can do the original task they are set. Pupils' work that I looked at during my visit shows that, for example, the most able pupils are set highly challenging problems to solve, which pupils I met told me they find 'really tricky'. Lower-ability pupils are also being given work that is helping them to both catch up and become more confident. For example, less-able pupils in Year 2 have learned about the value of the tens and units, and used their knowledge to conclude that 80 must be greater than 43, even though 80 has three fewer units. You and subject leaders are fully aware of the importance of ensuring that all information that teachers supply to you is rigorous and can withstand challenge. You are ensuring that they bring a sample of pupils' work along to each staff meeting, which you then discuss together. Teachers also meet with colleagues in other local schools, in other schools in the trust, and in schools in the local authority, to check the accuracy of their assessments. You are ensuring that you give additional guidance to those teachers who are new to the profession in order to ensure that they also become skilled at judging the progress and attainment of their pupils.

Teachers are attending more effectively, and briskly, to misconceptions that pupils have. Pupils told me how, if they make a mistake, teachers are happy to explain the process to them again. If they are still unsure, teachers will use different words or another approach, so that pupils can understand. Your own scrutinies of pupils' work show a clear reduction in the number of occasions when their mistakes are left uncorrected by teachers. Work that I examined confirms that, on most occasions, teachers spot these errors and attend to them effectively. For example, the teacher in Year 5 had reminded several pupils to use full stops and capital letters in their writing. In almost all cases, the pupils concerned had subsequently attended to this. Where they had not, the teacher noted it and reminded the pupil again.

You and the leader for mathematics are making sure that teachers in all year groups are planning many more opportunities for pupils to reason mathematically and to solve problems. As a result, pupils are more able to explain their thinking both aloud and in writing. For instance, pupils in Year 3 were using three-digit subtraction, and in the process of their calculations could confidently explain why $10 \times 10 = 100$. Workbooks from pupils in Year 4 showed that, for example, they were asked what they noticed when they counted in 25s from 50. Pupils were able to identify that the units' digit always alternated between a five and a zero. Teachers are keen to ensure that the 'chilli challenges', which pupils enjoy, make pupils think deeply. Work shows that, if a pupil demonstrates that they are confidently and quickly able to complete the 'hot challenges', they are told to try a 'flaming hot' one.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The support of the Discovery Schools Academies Trust is enabling Woolden Hill to

improve quickly. For example, the trust's head of governance has assisted the advisory board in completing an audit of board members' skills, and identifying their training needs as a result. She is attending meetings of the board to ensure that members are fully clear about their role in holding leaders to account, as set out in the new scheme of delegation. The trust is providing the board with detailed information, in a manageable form, that will allow the advisory board to ask searching questions of senior leaders regarding teaching and the results of pupils' work sampling. The trust's coordinator for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is ensuring that these pupils are receiving increasingly effective support to make good progress from their starting points by meeting with teachers to discuss the needs, achievement and progress of each pupil on a termly basis. Furthermore, members of the trust are organising annual reviews of all aspects of the academy's provision by national leaders of education unconnected with the cluster, so that the judgements of leaders can be scrutinised. The trust is fully committed to ensuring that it continues to provide an appropriate level of support until the academy becomes good at its next inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the advisory board, the chief executive officer of the Discovery Schools Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Leicestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall

Her Majesty's Inspector