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13 November 2017

Mr Mark Ingham
Principal
Exeter — A Learning Community Academy
Brayford Avenue
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Dear Mr Ingham

Special measures monitoring inspection of Exeter — A Learning Community Academy

Following my visit with Hazel Henson, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 17–18 October 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 academy’s previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures, following the inspection that took place in November 2016. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The academy’s improvement plan is not fit for purpose. You have not written an improvement plan. You have been familiarising yourself with the school since you took up your post in September.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Di Mullan

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve leadership and management urgently, so that:
 - leaders identify the reasons why pupils are underachieving and so can take the right actions to ensure that the pupils make better progress
 - subject leaders have the knowledge and the opportunities necessary to bring about better teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility
 - pupils enjoy a broad curriculum and their skills and knowledge in every subject grow as they move through the school
 - leaders provide accurate reports to governors about the school's performance
 - governors have the skills and confidence to hold leaders to account and to bring about school improvement
 - pupil premium funding is used effectively
 - the school's website meets requirements.
- Improve outcomes for all pupils and raise the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - using information about the pupils' performance and the quality of teaching to provide effective training where it is required, particularly in the teaching of mathematics and reading
 - ensuring that the most able pupils receive work that is challenging and enables them to attain high standards
 - ensuring that teachers use lesson time efficiently and give pupils work that enables them to make at least good progress in all subjects
 - giving pupils plenty of opportunities to use and to develop their writing skills throughout the curriculum.
- Improve the quality of teaching and leadership in the early years by:
 - ensuring that leaders responsible for the early years make regular and robust checks on the quality of teaching and assessment in the Reception classes
 - ensuring that all necessary training is provided to secure better provision in the Reception classes
 - sharing the good practice evident in the Nursery.
- Improve pupils' personal development, welfare and behaviour by reducing the rates of absence and persistent absence.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this

aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be further improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 17 October 2017 to 18 October 2017

Evidence

The inspectors held meetings with the principal, both vice principals and the special educational needs coordinator. They also met with the chief executive officer of Woodnewton Academy Trust and three members of the local governing body. They held discussions with the leaders with responsibility for the Nursery and Reception classes and three other members of staff. Inspectors observed learning in classes across the school and examined pupils' books with school leaders. Inspectors spoke with parents as they brought their children to school, informally with pupils around school and formally with a group of pupils. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation provided by the school, including that relating to the progress that pupils make, action plans for improvement and the safeguarding of pupils.

Context

Since the monitoring visit in May 2017, there have been further significant changes to staffing. The interim principal left her post in June 2017. One of the current vice principals held the post for the remainder of the summer term. You took up your post as principal in September 2017.

The outgoing principal had set in motion a restructure of the leadership team, which has subsequently taken place. Two vice principals and an assistant principal now form your senior leadership team. They were appointed in January 2017 and September 2017 from within the school and the trust. The middle leadership team now comprises eight year-group leaders, who represent each year group from Nursery to Year 6, most of whom have been appointed from within the staff team. Two new teachers have been appointed. Two long-term supply teachers left their posts earlier this term, and two more supply teachers are currently sharing the teaching of these classes with one of the vice principals. Two other supply teachers teach other classes in school.

A premises officer and an attendance officer have recently been appointed. The attendance officer is currently undertaking training and will begin her post at the end of October.

Three governors left during the summer. One subsequently returned to the governing body, leaving two vacancies. There is also a vacancy for a staff governor and a parent governor.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders, including governors and representatives of the trust, have not taken

effective action since the monitoring visit in May 2017. The quality of teaching has not been sufficiently improved to ensure that pupils make the progress of which they are capable.

Leaders collect information about how well pupils are doing in reading, writing and mathematics. They use this information to check the proportion of pupils who are working at the expected standard, or above, for their age. However, they do not analyse in depth the progress that groups of pupils make from their starting points. Leaders and teachers are not making full use of this information to be certain that the correct actions take place to maximise the progress of all pupils. Governors do not fully understand the information they receive about pupils' attainment and progress. This hinders their ability to hold leaders to account.

Year-group leaders are new to post this term. They are still undertaking training, and familiarising themselves with their responsibilities. Some have shared information about pupils' achievement with their teams, but others have not. They have not begun their work to improve the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils.

Leaders have not provided governors with sufficiently detailed information. Governors do not receive documents far enough in advance of meetings for them to be able to read the information and consider the questions they would like to ask. Governors have undertaken some training since the last monitoring visit. However, they acknowledge that they are not being robust in their challenge of leaders, nor are they insisting that actions take place quickly enough. An external review of governance took place in February 2017. Governors have been acting on the recommendations that were stated in the review. They have not, however, written an action plan to address fully the necessary long-term improvements in governance.

The school commissioned an external review of the use of pupil premium funding. This took place in May 2017. The draft report was challenged by the trust, and the planned follow-up visit in July 2017 did not take place. Leaders have not written an action plan to address the findings of the review, as they do not accept them. The allocation of the pupil premium funding for this year lacks detail. It is not based closely enough on addressing the barriers to learning for the pupils. It does not contain the information that leaders need to ensure that the impact of the spending can be closely monitored and evaluated. Leaders and the trust acknowledge that they must urgently commission another review. Too much time has been lost in successfully addressing this aspect of leadership.

The school website does not meet requirements because some aspects are out of date and others do not contain sufficient detail. This includes information relating to key stage 2 results, the use of pupil premium funding and primary physical education (PE) and sport funding.

The instability in staffing has hampered the improvements that leaders have been able to make. Changes to leadership and staffing mean that any actions that have been taken have not been followed through with consistency. For example, the interim principal introduced a new curriculum. This was intended to encourage teachers to be creative in their teaching and to make strong links across subjects so that learning makes sense for pupils. During the inspection, Severn Trent Water was visiting some classes to help pupils learn about water consumption. The pupils were fascinated to learn about the amount of water that comes from a tap in two minutes. While pupils' books showed that they study a range of subjects to capture their interests, leaders have not checked closely that the curriculum is consistently taught in an engaging way.

Since your appointment as principal, you have undertaken important work to engage staff and parents. This has been necessary to rebuild relationships with parents and staff, following an extended period of instability in staffing. However, you have not ensured that the school has a clear action plan in place to secure improvements. Some leaders have written action plans and others are currently writing them to address their individual areas of responsibility. There is no overarching plan to bring about the improvements that are urgently required in the school and to ensure that they are sustained in the long term.

Leaders' evaluation of the work of the school is accurate. Leaders, governors and the chief executive officer of the trust readily acknowledge that not enough has been done to improve the quality of teaching, attendance, leadership and outcomes for pupils since the last monitoring visit. They show a real commitment to accelerating the rate of improvement at the school, but it is far too early to judge the impact of their determination.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not improving quickly enough. The trust has not supported leaders to provide teachers with the training and support they need to be able to improve their practice. Due to the changes in staffing, leaders have not undertaken a systematic monitoring of the quality of teaching, nor have they provided high-quality, well-considered professional development for teachers to improve their teaching skills.

In too many lessons, time is not well used and teachers do not use effective questioning to deepen pupils' understanding and address misconceptions. Too often, teachers do not make effective use of assessment information to match the work they provide to the abilities of the pupils. They do not step in quickly to move pupils on to more difficult work as soon as they are able to tackle it. Recently, teachers have been considering more closely the intended learning of the lesson and sharing this with pupils. However, a scrutiny of pupils' books shows that teachers are not all successfully implementing this approach. For example, teachers sometimes provide pupils with success criteria that are not phrased in a way that is

easy for pupils to understand or that match the work they can do. Observations of lessons and the scrutiny of pupils' books also show that not all teachers have strong subject knowledge. This means that they are unable to explain some concepts clearly, and pupils are sometimes given incorrect information.

Teachers' implementation of the school's marking and feedback policy is inconsistent. The principal has plans to review this to ensure that pupils receive useful feedback that will help them to improve their work.

In some lessons, teachers make effective links with pupils' previous learning so that pupils build their skills and understanding logically. For example, teachers encourage pupils to use their strong phonic knowledge when they spell words, reminding them to think back to recent lessons. Pupils' books show that, sometimes, teachers make sensible links between lessons so that pupils practise their new skills. Pupils who had learned about particular types of verbs were reminded to use them as they wrote a persuasive letter to the principal.

The leader with responsibility for the Reception class is new to post this term. Over the summer months, one of the vice principals used the information she had gained from spending time in the Reception classes to reorganise the setting. This has enabled children to access a wider variety of learning experiences, both indoors and outdoors, supported more consistently by staff. Leaders ensured that children's transition from the Nursery to Reception classes was well planned, giving children opportunities to become familiar with the environment and their new teachers. Leaders have provided Reception staff with some useful training to improve their practice. The Nursery leader has ensured that Nursery staff have shared their effective practice with Reception staff. Leaders have undertaken some observations in the Reception classes since the last monitoring visit. Leaders have not made robust checks to ensure that the support and training they have provided to staff has successfully improved their practice. There is still work to do to ensure that the quality of teaching in the Reception classes is consistently high. Observations during the inspection showed that routines have not been well established across all the Reception classes. Some staff do not have high enough expectations of what children can achieve. Staff do not reliably encourage children to persevere at a task, failing to ask well-considered questions to promote language development and learning.

The provision in the Nursery continues to be a strength of the school. Staff consider carefully the needs and development of the individual children. Staff take every opportunity to develop children's language and listening skills. Their high expectations and clear routines enable children to feel safe and to make the most of the learning experiences that are on offer.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The overall attendance of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, has risen slightly

over the last year. However, attendance still falls short of the national average for all pupils and for all groups of pupils. You have recently appointed an attendance officer to help to address this situation. You have implemented a policy to ensure that pupils who arrive late must come into school through the main entrance door. During the inspection, several pupils arrived late to school. The school reception area is very busy during this time and it was unclear who was checking which pupils arrived late and how they were addressing this. You reward good attendance, and many pupils attend school regularly. There is still work to do to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly and on time.

During the inspection, inspectors observed pupils in class, as they moved around school, at lunchtime and at play. The majority of pupils behave sensibly. They only become distracted in class when teachers do not provide them with engaging learning. On the playground, pupils told inspectors that if there is any bullying they could speak with an adult who will deal with it for them. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school. One of the vice principals has provided effective support to the midday supervisors. This has empowered them to be able to interact well with pupils and manage pupils' behaviour calmly and effectively.

Outcomes for pupils

Provisional information for 2017 shows that by the end of Year 6 more pupils achieved the expected levels in reading and mathematics than had been seen in 2016. Information also shows that more pupils achieved the higher level in writing and mathematics than had been seen in 2016. Leaders recognise that this is partly due to an experienced teacher providing the pupils with intensive support during the year. However, the proportions of pupils achieving these standards in 2017 were still below the national averages. Provisional information also shows that the progress that these Year 6 pupils had made from their starting points was below the national average for writing and in the bottom 10% nationally for both reading and mathematics.

The school's own assessment information indicates that most pupils make the progress the school expects of them. However, this information is not analysed sufficiently well to be certain of the progress that all groups of pupils make from their starting points. A scrutiny of pupils' books and observations in lessons indicate that pupils, particularly those who are the most able, do not make the progress of which they may be capable because teachers do not reliably provide them with sufficiently challenging work.

Provisional information for 2017 shows that by the end of key stage one, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in each of reading, writing and mathematics had fallen from that seen in the school in 2016. The proportion achieving the expected standard in each subject is below the national average for 2016. Unvalidated information also shows that the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check in 2017 was just below the national

average for 2016. About half of the children achieved a good level of development by the end of the early years in 2017.

Teachers have received some support from the trust to check the accuracy of their assessments of pupils' learning. There is more work to do to ensure that teachers make the best use of assessment information to provide pupils of all abilities with suitable levels of challenge to maximise their progress.

External support

The trust has not provided sufficiently effective support for the school since the monitoring visit in May 2017.

The trust has ensured that the school has a permanent principal in place and that the new leadership structure has been implemented. The trust has not provided strong support to ensure that the school is staffed with a full complement of permanent teachers. At the time of this visit, four classes were being taught by supply teachers.

The trust has not ensured that teachers have access to high-quality training or that leaders and governors undertake their duties effectively. It has not made sure that the school has a current improvement plan in place or that the findings of the reviews of the use of the pupil premium and governance have been acted on.

A new chief executive officer was appointed in June 2017. She shows determination and commitment that the trust will provide effective support and challenge in the future. School leaders have accessed support from the trust to moderate assessments. Recently, arrangements have been made within the trust for principals to work together to share good practice. It is too early to judge the impact of this support.

Leaders should take urgent further action to:

- Write a school development plan that is sufficiently detailed to drive forward the sustainable improvements that are required, coordinating all action plans and monitoring arrangements.