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Mrs Josephine Milton
Principal
Stimpson Avenue Academy
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Dear Mrs Milton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Stimpson Avenue Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 2nd November 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 March 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and the academy improvement board 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 academy improvement board informs parents of the improvements the academy has made since the start of the academic year, the impact of these and the action that leaders intend to take next
- subject leaders for foundation subjects are given opportunities to scrutinise pupils' work in the subjects for which they are responsible.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with yourself and the interim associate headteacher. I met with the subject leaders for English and mathematics, history, and geography, as well as the head of the early years. I also held a telephone conversation with the chair of the academy improvement board. I met both the chief executive officer and the director of education from the EMLC trust, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the leaders' improvement planning and undertook a scrutiny of pupils' workbooks from children of different ages. I also toured the academy with the interim associate headteacher to see lessons taking place in all key stages. I met with a large number of pupils from different year groups. I checked that the academy's records of safeguarding checks met requirements.

Context

The principal was absent from May and began a phased return to work from the start of this academic year. The trust appointed an interim associate headteacher, who took over the academy's leadership during the principal's absence. The principal has now returned to work on a full-time basis. However, the interim associate headteacher currently remains in post so that the momentum of improvement is unaffected. Two members of the teaching staff are on long-term absence. There is a new chair of the academy improvement board.

Main findings

Following your temporary absence, the trust acted quickly to secure an experienced and knowledgeable leader who could ensure that no time was lost in moving the academy forward after the inspection. The interim associate headteacher is now working very closely with you to ensure that the pace of change does not slow. Communication between you both is of a high quality. You are united in your vision and determination. You have a shared understanding of what needs to be done so that your academy is judged to be good at its next inspection.

Senior leaders, along with the academy improvement board and the multi-academy trust, have written a clear improvement plan that explains the context of the academy and the actions that have been taken thus far. This plan sets out a logical series of actions to attend quickly to the key areas for improvement. The planned actions reflect the timescale you have before the academy is re-inspected. There is a clear sense of urgency. There is an appropriate spread of activities and leaders have these placed in sequential order. However, the plan sensibly avoids too many things happening at once. A key strength of the plan are its precise timescales, along with criteria by which the academy improvement board can judge the impact of actions. Training, resources and the time that is needed for each action are also

explicit. This plan is helping both the trust and the improvement board to hold you and the interim associate headteacher to account.

You and both senior and subject leaders are ensuring that there is a wide range of monitoring activities taking place. For example, subject leaders now meet with you and senior leaders on a fortnightly basis to review the quality of teaching and the achievements of pupils. Leaders have drawn up a comprehensive electronic calendar of monitoring so that everyone can see what leaders are checking, when and how. You measure success against the rate of progress pupils make. When leaders observe lessons, they let teachers know the strengths they have seen and where teaching needs to improve further. Leaders expect teachers to attend to any weaknesses in teaching, such as an inappropriate pace, very quickly. You ensure that teachers receive good support and guidance to improve their teaching. When a teacher is observed again, leaders check that they have improved on any identified weaknesses. If required, you ensure that they receive further support so they have the skills to teach well. When leaders sample pupils' work, they have a clear focus, such as ensuring that teachers are adjusting work for pupils' different needs. This allows everyone to see where pupils are learning best and where better teaching is needed to accelerate their progress. You share summaries of monitoring activities so that everyone is clear on what needs to happen next.

The academy improvement board is undertaking its overall responsibilities well. Led by a confident and skilled educational adviser for the department for education, the board is closely supporting both you and the interim associate headteacher. However, at the same time, it is also holding you to account for the quality of teaching and the amount of progress pupils are making. Shortly after the inspection, senior leaders, the improvement board and the trust informed parents of the improvements that you all planned to make. You also sent parents written details of these changes and held coffee mornings for them to keep them informed. You have scheduled further coffee mornings for later this term. However, at present the academy improvement board has not given parents details on what actions leaders have taken since September, what effect these have had, nor what next steps you are planning to continue the trajectory of improvement.

You have introduced a series of new topics in the curriculum, which commence with 'wow weeks' to engage pupils' interests. Pupils I met told me that they enjoy these greatly. For instance, Year 6 pupils explained enthusiastically to me how, as the introduction to their studies on New Zealand, they had recently been taught the haka dance. You and subject leaders are undertaking an audit of the timetable to ensure that pupils are given more opportunities to learn about subjects such as music and art. As some of your subject leaders are new in their role, you are giving them good support so that they understand their leadership responsibilities. They now all meet with senior leaders every fortnight. They have undertaken a comprehensive audit of resources so they can order things needed to teach their subjects in a way that will excite pupils. Although leaders of subjects other than English or mathematics completed some monitoring of their subject in the summer,

they have not had an opportunity to look at pupils' books this term. They cannot, therefore, yet report to the academy improvement board on the progress pupils are currently making in these subjects.

You and the interim associate headteacher are ensuring that teaching is improving by giving each teacher a personalised training programme to raise his or her skills. You have a clear expectation that teaching will be consistently good by the end of this academic year. In addition to individual development opportunities, staff have had training on the academy's new scheme for teaching mathematics. You and senior leaders have chosen this scheme because you believe that it is effective in teaching pupils how to overcome their misconceptions in mathematics, and that its structure supports those teachers who feel less confident, or who are new to the profession. You also chose the scheme because you felt it is effective in giving work for pupils of different abilities. You are checking that the plans teachers write take account of pupils' different needs. Over the last half term, you have noted that the progress of pupils in mathematics is beginning to accelerate. Nevertheless, you plan further support for teachers so that, for example, they plan sufficient problem-solving and reasoning opportunities for pupils.

Pupils' books show that there are fewer occasions where teachers do not address pupils' misconceptions. In September, the interim associate headteacher organised staff training on the effective teaching of grammar, so that staff understood how to look for common errors pupils make. From your scrutiny of pupils' work, you have a clear idea of where teachers still need further support to ensure they spot and address these misconceptions consistently. Pupils say that they like the new system of feedback. It helps them know when they have made a mistake and teachers are showing them how to put it right.

Pupils are also taking a greater pride in their presentation. Pupils say that they practise their handwriting each day using a new handwriting scheme and that teachers expect them to apply their skills in their workbooks across the curriculum. They know that if they do not try their best, teachers will expect them to do it again. You are also expecting staff to write on whiteboards, displays and in books in a neat and legible manner, so that adults model writing to pupils effectively and demonstrate to them how important it is not to produce untidy and rushed written work. Pupils' mathematics books also show that pupils are completing their calculations much more neatly.

The academy's new behaviour policy is having a positive impact on pupils' behaviour in lessons. During my visit, on almost all occasions, pupils were listening carefully to their teacher, following instructions as asked and working hard. You and other leaders often visit lessons to ensure that pupils are behaving well. You check that teachers quickly address any instances of pupils losing focus. You are keeping a record of any disruptions for each class and lesson so that you can analyse any trends. Pupils I met spoke very positively about the new expectations and said that they were an improvement because they could get on with their work without

undue distractions. Pupils are also positive about these expectations because they are known to everyone. They say that adults apply them fairly to everyone.

Teachers in the early years are improving how they plan their lessons. They make increasingly effective assessments of what children know or can do at the end of each lesson. This enables them to adjust their planning for the next day.

The early years lead meets with teachers fortnightly to discuss their planning, and ensures that the judgements they make on children are accurate. She is also working alongside the trust's academy challenge adviser to ensure that the action plan remains focused on the correct priorities. Staff in the early years have been given training to understand the purpose of collecting evidence of children's achievements across all areas of learning. A new system is tracking the children's progress more rigorously. Staff, who were previously assessing children for the first time late in the autumn term, are now doing this shortly after children begin at the academy. This ensures the brisk identification of any children who enter with levels of skills that are lower than those typically found, so that staff can plan activities to help them catch up.

External support

The trust acted briskly to provide the academy with a very capable and skilled headteacher to take over leadership in the temporary absence of the principal. It has continued to support the academy extensively, for example, checking that leaders are implementing the action plan well and adjusting it when necessary. The trust has commissioned an external organisation to provide training and support to raise the quality of teaching within the academy, including the teaching and leadership of English and mathematics. This organisation has assisted subject leaders to see outstanding teaching in another academy. It has also ensured that colleagues in a range of other schools moderate and check the assessments of the work that pupils at Stimpson Avenue complete. A member of the trust is also on the academy improvement board. She is responsible for ensuring that the board and trust receive reliable and detailed information on pupils' achievements across the academy, including that of disadvantaged pupils. The trust is fully committed to continuing to provide the academy with all the support necessary so that it becomes good at the earliest opportunity.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the academy improvement board, the chief executive officer of the ELMC multi-academy 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

Roary Pownall

Her Majesty's Inspector