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Mrs Burkett
Principal
Kingfisher Academy
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Dear Mrs Burkett

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Kingfisher Academy

Following my visit to your school on 22 June 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in September 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, two middle leaders, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the trust. The trust's statement of action and the school's improvement/action plan were evaluated.

Context

Staffing has been stable since the previous inspection. There have been no changes of teachers or leaders. A different teaching assistant has taken on responsibility of the additional provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language. Two governors have stepped down from the governing body.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Your determined and focused leadership make a strong contribution to the improvement that is evident across the school. You and the leadership team have a firm grasp on the weaknesses in the school. Since the previous inspection, teaching has improved and outcomes are gradually rising. You have galvanised the staff. There is a sense of teamwork and a desire from staff to continually improve.

Leaders have refined the school improvement plan and statement of action. As a result, there is now a clearer direction for the school. Actions are precise and enable you to make swift changes. The measurable success criteria allow you to evaluate if you are on track to meet your priorities. The pupil premium plan does not include the barriers that disadvantaged pupils face or information about how leaders will evaluate pupil premium strategies.

You continue to develop other leaders and ensure that they have a positive impact on school improvement. The English and mathematics leads can articulate clearly how their subjects have improved and what needs to happen next. They have been central to improvements in their subjects. For example, the culture for reading has been raised across the school and the quality of pupils' mathematical reasoning skills has improved.

The multi-academy trust has responded well to issues raised about governance in the previous inspection. There is a sense of urgency that outcomes need to be higher. Visits to the school and trust meetings show an appropriate level of challenge and support. The trust's chief improvement officer visits the school regularly and reports the school's progress to the trust. You also commissioned two external reviews from a consultant, so that the trust can receive an impartial evaluation of the school's effectiveness.

The chair of the local governing body knows the school very well. He has ensured that governors visit the school more often and ask robust questions to challenge leaders. Governors have an effective understanding of pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. The minutes of meetings do not always reflect the actual levels of challenge that occur on those occasions. For example, one set of minutes stated that governors asked questions about data and leaders answered them. Minutes did not reflect the specific questions and answers raised.

While governance at trust and local governing body levels has improved, there is still some work to do. The school's website is not fully compliant. Information in relation to governance, and the school's use of the pupil premium and the physical education (PE) and sport premium funding does not meet the requirements set out by the Department for Education. The information about governance is available, but has not been published on the website.

The trust has not yet fully considered conflicts of interest. They employ the chief

improvement officer to carry out a school improvement service. She is also a trustee and a governor. Her educational experience has been important to the governing body since the previous inspection. However, the trust has not reviewed whether this scenario presents a conflict or clarified what procedures are in place to manage conflicts of interest.

The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection. Teachers' questioning skills are developing well. This is evident in pupils' reading comprehension sessions. Teachers ask probing questions verbally or through written tasks. This helps to deepen pupils' understanding of the texts they are reading. The new 'home reading rockets' initiative has created excitement among the pupils and most are reading more regularly. You are well aware that there is still some remaining weaker teaching. When this occurs, subject knowledge is not precise enough and pupils' progress slows.

You have ensured that mathematics has received an appropriate focus since the previous inspection. The most striking part of mathematics teaching is the opportunities for reasoning and problem solving. As the year has progressed, pupils have been regularly applying their skills in order to justify and prove their mathematical understanding. The most able pupils are challenged more effectively because of this approach.

You have put a strong emphasis on improving pupils' handwriting. They practise their handwriting skills regularly and most pupils' handwriting is improving over time. However, an awkward grip of the pen hampers some pupils and they do not receive precise additional support to hold the pen properly.

You have established clear systems for assessing and tracking pupils' learning. Regular moderation of pupils' work has enabled teacher assessment to be more accurate. You have also added a layer of security by carrying out standardised tests, so that you can add further confidence to the assessment process. Critically, you have ensured that staff use assessment to identify gaps in pupils' skills and knowledge and use this information to inform the teaching of future lessons. Your assessment information and the work in pupils' books show that attainment is improving. For example, current attainment in Year 6 is higher than it has been previously. Where there is remaining weaker teaching, outcomes are not rising as positively.

The provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language has improved. Specific staff training has led to increased support during lessons. Pupils can access learning more effectively because resources are readily available. A teaching assistant has recently taken on the responsibility for additional out-of-class support. This transition has been managed well and she delivers effective sessions. Pupils who are new to the country and have little or no English settle very well. You have rightly identified that staff would benefit from training on phonics delivery, so that it is as precise as possible. This will help to further support pupils who speak English

as an additional language and other pupils in the school.

Pupils' behaviour in class and at social times during the inspection was positive. Occasionally, pupils' behaviour is not as good when teaching is weaker. Support for pupils who have complex behavioural needs is effective and fixed-term exclusions are low when compared to national figures.

Pupils' attendance is improving. Attendance rates for this academic year are much higher than for the last academic year. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has declined. You and other leaders follow up attendance issues well. Parents and carers have a growing awareness of the importance of their child's regular attendance at school.

In order to address the issues identified in this visit, trustees, governors and leaders should take further action to:

- ensure that the school website is fully compliant with the requirements set out by the Department for Education
- improve the precision of phonics teaching for those pupils receiving additional support for reading.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matt Meckin
Her Majesty's Inspector