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Janey Denton
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Dear Ms Denton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kingfisher Community Primary School

Following my visit to your academy on 5 October 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the academy has received two judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in July 2017, the academy was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and the trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the academy to become good.

The academy should take further action to:

- improve the presentation of work by pupils in key stage 1 and lower key stage 2, including their handwriting
- make sure that pupils are using their improving phonics skills to spell words correctly in their own independent writing
- map out the many positive aspects of the curriculum that already exist so that the intention is clear, and the impact of the opportunities that pupils experience can be celebrated.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, head of school, other middle leaders, the multi-academy trust chief executive officer and three members of the new regional improvement board, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans were also evaluated. I observed phonics teaching and visited each class to observe learning and talk to pupils about their work. I looked at a selection of pupils' work and scrutinised a range of school documentation relating to leadership and governance. I also examined the single central record of recruitment checks.

Context

Staffing has remained mainly stable since the previous inspection. A head of school has been appointed to work closely with the executive headteacher. The trust replaced the regional governing body for Medway with a regional improvement board in September 2018.

Main findings

The trust recognises that there were weaknesses in the administration of some safeguarding checks at the time of the previous inspection. However, at no time were pupils unsafe as a result of this. The omissions were put right at the time of the previous inspection and the checks have been maintained meticulously since then. During my visit I observed very strong processes around safer recruitment and a rigorous approach to ensuring that all necessary checks are recorded. More important than this is the strong safeguarding culture I found within the school. Leaders take every possible step to keep their pupils safe and to support them and their families. This is enhanced by the excellent work of the home-school support worker.

Outcomes in the phonics screening check in Year 1 and the recheck in Year 2 have continued to rise and now compare favourably with national averages. This is due to the consistent approach to teaching phonics throughout the school. Leaders responsible for this vital area of the school's work are passionate about getting pupils reading early and confidently. Pupils enjoy their phonics sessions and understand the routines to follow. Assessment is used carefully to ensure that pupils are in the right group to get the support and challenge they need. The phonics leader spends his time coaching his colleagues and demonstrating good practice so that they can improve the accuracy of their teaching. This is leading to children in Reception, pupils in key stage 1 and the few key stage 2 pupils who have fallen behind all making at least good progress in reading. We agreed that pupils would benefit from being taught to form their letters correctly and neatly at an earlier stage. This would improve their presentation and their ability to read back their own work. A few of the pupils who experienced this improved phonics teaching, and slightly more of the older pupils who missed it, still make errors in their own spelling.

Teaching throughout the school is interesting and engaging. Teachers generally use assessment information well to plan challenging tasks. Pupils are developing their knowledge and skills well in a wide range of subjects. They now have many opportunities to apply their English and mathematical skills. More of the most able pupils are now reaching the higher standards at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2.

The curriculum uses a published scheme to ensure that it is broad and balanced. This is enhanced by high-quality texts that pupils are able to get engrossed in. For example, I saw Year 5 pupils rewriting 'The Highwayman', by the poet Alfred Noyes, as a story, demonstrating their deep knowledge of the poem. We discussed how the curriculum could be further enhanced by making your specific intentions for the pupils clear, and by setting out your ambitious aspirations for them to experience, 'proud traditions, wide horizons and high achievement'.

The trust provides many opportunities to enhance pupils' learning and experiences further, for example through attending an annual arts festival, which this year has the theme 'our green and pleasant land'. Further visits, trips and experiences, including performing one of Shakespeare's plays, are clearly helping to raise pupils' aspirations. Parents are really supportive when their children first start school, but you sometimes have difficulty maintaining the levels of parental support as pupils grow older. You are determined to overcome this, not least by proving to parents what their children are capable of.

I looked at your raising-achievement plan, school improvement plan and Ofsted action plan. They are each fit for purpose and focus on the right things to improve the school. They have clear milestones and measurable targets, and outline who is responsible for the improvements. You explained clearly how each plan has a different role in the trust's accountability system and how any duplication is avoided. Altogether, if the planned actions are implemented successfully, the school is on track towards being good or better at its next full inspection.

From what I found on my visit, your ambition for the school, its pupils and the community is very clear. The target that you have set for yourself of '100% achievement of the expected standard' is very challenging. You and your team are dedicated to working hard to achieve this. You have already set about raising the aspirations of your pupils by providing a learning environment that is, in places, stunning. You have focused on improving teaching and leadership through coaching and developing your own teachers and leaders for the future. This gives you significant capacity to make continuous improvements.

External support

In the words of the chief executive officer, the Griffin Schools Trust is a 'headteacher-led' organisation. As such, executive headteachers challenge each other to make the necessary improvements to their schools. This has worked well at

Kingfisher because the participants trust and challenge each other. The previous local governing body brought community experience to the school but did not ask sufficiently robust questions to leaders to improve things as rapidly as the trust hoped. The new improvement board is the trust's strategy to move quickly beyond good to outstanding. Members of the new board have the experience and expertise to do this.

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

Yours sincerely

Lee Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector