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Mrs Leila Naldrett
Head of Teaching and Learning
Gatehouse Primary Academy
Secmaton Lane
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Dear Mrs Naldrett

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Gatehouse Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 9 October 2018, 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 school's most recent section 5 inspection.

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

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, the chief executive officer of the First Federation Trust, senior leaders from the trust, the chair of the trust board and the unit leaders. I observed pupils learning in class and reviewed their work. The school's arrangements for safeguarding were checked.

The trust's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were also evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection in November 2017, there have been several changes to the leadership of the school. Throughout this period, one of the trust's executive heads of teaching and learning has overseen the school's work and she continues to do so. You were appointed to the role of head of teaching and learning at the start of this term, having held a similar role in another of the trust's schools.

You are supported by four unit leaders. Two of these colleagues have taken on these roles having taught at the school for several years. Two have transferred from similar roles in other schools in the trust. The trust has provided interim leadership for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Arrangements are under way to transfer this responsibility to a member of the school's teaching staff.

The school is also benefiting from the work of the teaching school, which is part of the trust's operation. This is providing training and support for staff to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

There has been significant change to the teaching staff at the school, with half of the teachers currently working in the school having arrived this term or in the previous academic year.

The number of pupils who attend the school has remained stable.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Trustees and senior officials in the trust have a clear understanding of the scale and scope of the considerable amount of work that is needed. They recognise that the journey of improvement is still in the early days. The chief executive officer is clear about the improvements seen so far and the 'continued, rapid improvement' that is still needed. Trustees have invested heavily in temporary staffing arrangements and leadership support and in allocating resources. Over the course of the last year, two unit leaders from other trust schools were recruited to work at the school in September 2017, and a new head of teaching and learning has been brought in from September 2018. Trust leaders have the capacity to provide the necessary support and expertise to improve outcomes for pupils and the initial signs of improvement can be seen.

School leaders and trust staff are united in the common goal of improving the quality of teaching and learning to improve pupils' life chances. School-based staff have a particularly strong commitment to the leaders' vision and values.

The trust's specialist leader for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has quickly established systems to identify and support pupils' needs effectively. She has begun to ensure that the impact of additional funding is being evaluated. There is a clear plan in place to train school-based staff to take over these responsibilities. Although this process has only begun in earnest this term, it is clear to see that it is being managed strategically to ensure a successful transition.

The staff team has evaluated what the pupils know, understand and can do. From this, it has reviewed the curriculum and planned learning that will allow pupils to catch up on the knowledge that they should have gained earlier in their school career. Pupils comment that the new curriculum is much more interesting, and their

work reflects this.

Leaders have been successful in ensuring that teachers are clear about the standards expected for the children in their class. This has led to teachers and teaching assistants having high expectations about the standards pupils can achieve in their academic work and their personal development. Where routines are clear, and standards insisted on, pupils rise to these, including the very youngest children in early years.

Staff have benefited from a wide range of training and support. Most of this has been provided by the trust and has helped staff to understand how they can improve the quality of their work to raise the standards that pupils achieve.

Teachers are increasingly accurate in their assessments, and moderation with other schools in the trust provides leaders and governors with the assurances that they need. Leaders recognise that there is more to do to improve the quality of teaching further.

Leaders' work to improve teaching so that it extends pupils' reading, writing and numeracy skills across the range of subjects is paying off. This has been aligned with the revision of the curriculum, which is now far more engaging. For example, in art, pupils write detailed critiques of the paintings of William Turner.

Pupils' knowledge and use of phonics have not been strong in the past. Leaders have introduced a new approach to the teaching of phonics in early years and key stage 1. The impact can be seen through the increasingly consistent teaching of phonics across classes in Reception Year and Year 1. However, many pupils in Year 2 do not use and apply their phonics knowledge and skills when reading. Pupils in key stage 2 do not benefit from the same level of understanding of phonics. As a result, pupils' spelling lacks accuracy and their writing is weakened.

Leaders' actions to improve reading are supporting pupils to analyse texts better, to strengthen their reading comprehension. This is having a positive effect. Pupils are now able to extract information and use the context of the text to infer and deduce meaning. However, leaders are not yet successfully ensuring that pupils have the secure understanding of phonics they need to approach unfamiliar words. Many pupils do not take into account the punctuation the author has used when they are reading a text. As a result, they do not appreciate the emphasis that the author intended, and many do not have a good understanding of the story they are reading.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have increased the range of books available for pupils to read and have relaunched a scheme to encourage pupils to read a wider range and more regularly. The library has been refreshed and now contains a wide range of fiction texts which interest pupils. However, the range of non-fiction texts is narrower.

Leaders have not yet enabled sufficient improvement in pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar skills. Leaders know that there is more to do to remedy this weakness. Consequently, pupils' writing is not improving as rapidly as it needs to. Leaders have identified urgency in tackling this area of the school's work. They have prioritised improving pupils' sentence construction this year, but there is, as yet, limited evidence of this strategy in pupils' work across subjects.

A fresh approach to the teaching of mathematics is showing early signs of positive impact. Pupils' basic numeracy and reasoning skills are improving, but it is early days. There is still much to do to improve the speed with which pupils complete basic calculations and gain a secure grasp of the properties of number and place value.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action 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 board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Devon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland
Her Majesty's Inspector