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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Jessica Humphrey
Executive headteacher
Kings Ash Academy
Pimm Road
Paignton
Devon
TQ3 3XA

Dear Mrs Humphrey

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kings Ash Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 16 November 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 school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in July 2016, the academy was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and the trust are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- urgently raise teachers' expectations of pupils' writing across the curriculum
- ensure that teachers consistently plan work that is precisely matched to pupils' needs
- ensure that the most able pupils are routinely challenged and stretched to reach the highest standards of which they are capable.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher and head of school, as well as English and mathematics subject leaders, and the assessment lead. The inspector also met with representatives of the trust, including the chief executive officer (CEO) and trustees, as well as the chair of the local governing body. In addition, the inspector met with the national leader of education (NLE) and specialist leader of education (SLE), who have been working with the school. The inspector met with a representative from the local authority for vulnerable pupils, who has been providing targeted support. This was to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated, together with other records, including governor visits and subject action plans. The inspector completed learning walks with senior leaders to evaluate the quality of work in pupils' books, and spoke with some individual pupils about their learning. The inspector also scrutinised records and documentation relating to safeguarding, and spoke with staff to determine their knowledge in implementing safeguarding practice and policies.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been considerable changes affecting leadership at trust and school level. The school has undergone significant change, with much turbulence: for example, you and the head of school only took over the day-to-day running of the school from January 2018. There has also been a different CEO appointed mid-term. In addition, there have been a significant number of changes to the teaching staff.

Main findings

Too much turbulence within the school and trust has seriously undermined the work of leaders to improve the school quickly enough since the last inspection in July 2016. Despite some marked improvements following your arrival in January 2018, these have been altogether too recent, and consequently, too many weaknesses remain, particularly in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. These continue to make the school vulnerable to not being judged as good at the next full inspection. However, you and other current leaders have been effective since you started working in the school. You have quickly understood what needs to be done to raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. You have also introduced vital measures to improve pupils' behaviour and secure their safety.

You have taken effective action to hold teachers to account. This has led to an immediate improvement in the quality of teaching. Furthermore, you have introduced systems that check pupils' progress. These are proving to be helpful in identifying pupils who need targeted support to accelerate their progress. However, in relation to the areas for improvement from the last inspection, the quality of pupils' writing, particularly across the curriculum, is too variable.

Teachers' expectations of pupils are not sufficiently high across a range of different writing activities. As a result, pupils are not consistently producing high-quality writing. Pupils make repeated errors in editorial skills, including spelling, punctuation and grammar, which are not routinely identified or addressed by teachers. Furthermore, there are times when teachers do not match work closely enough to the pupils' needs. For example, lower-achieving pupils struggling to write a sentence with a full stop are asked to complete work that shows, 'I can understand subordination'. This slows the progress and enjoyment of pupils. In addition, teachers' expectations of the most able pupils are not sufficiently high in writing, especially in subjects other than English. For example, talented and able writers are sometimes given restrictive models or 'frames' which constrain the depth, quality and sophistication of the writer. However, you and other leaders have an appropriate continuing professional development plan in place. Your improvement plans and actions to address weaknesses in pupils' writing are fit for purpose. As such, you have already started to implement an agreed whole-school strategy which is beginning to improve pupils' speaking and communication for writing.

As part of the monitoring inspection, I also evaluated the effectiveness of leaders' work to raise achievement for the most able pupils. You have taken steps to ensure that all pupils are correctly identified on pupil tracking grids, based on their prior attainment. This has immediately identified individuals who you believe are at risk of not reaching the highest standards. You use this information for discussion with teachers through pupil progress meetings. However, the most able pupils are not routinely challenged and stretched well enough to ensure that they make consistently strong progress. There is sometimes a mismatch between what pupils know and understand, and the work that is set for them in writing and mathematics. For example, teachers in Year 6 have set work for pupils based on a presumption that pupils can read and fully understand numbers to three decimal places, such as '28.176'. However, teachers have not checked whether pupils have a secure grasp of this and some pupils are given work using these digits without the understanding to accompany it. Leaders have not yet developed a comprehensive strategy for checking how well the most able pupils are being challenged. Currently, there are too few pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, reaching the highest standards, particularly in writing and mathematics.

Since your arrival, along with the head of school, you have rapidly improved pupils' behaviour and conduct. Together with staff, you have introduced new and consistent expectations of pupils. Pupils know what is expected of them and what will not be tolerated. As a result, pupils say that they are happy and feel safe. Pupils recognise improvements in behaviour, although they say that there is still some overly boisterous behaviour at times, which can be unsettling. You and other trust leaders ensure that arrangements for safeguarding pupils are rigorous. For example, staff recruitment, vetting and training are up to date and effective. There is a strong ethos and culture to keep pupils safe. This includes working with other agencies, including the local authority, to reduce exclusions, keeping pupils safely in

school and checking pupils in alternative provision regularly. However, you rightly identify that safeguarding and behaviour are ongoing priorities due to the high proportion of pupils with complex and additional needs in the school.

External support

School leaders are working closely in partnership with a teaching school (Oldway Primary), part of the Torbay Teaching School Alliance (TTSA). The link NLE and SLE are providing visits and guidance to supplement other school improvement work. You are also commissioning a local consultancy business to deliver work to improve the quality of teaching and learning in writing. You ensure that this work is well coordinated and aligned for continuity of themes, messages and expectations.

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

Yours sincerely

Stewart Gale

Her Majesty's Inspector