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Mrs Elizabeth Pollitt  
Principal  
The Oak Tree Academy  
Newham Grange Avenue  
Stockton-on-Tees  
TS19 0SE

Dear Mrs Pollitt

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Oak Tree Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 24 January 2019, 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.

Senior leaders and the board of trustees 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 school should take further action to:

- sustain the recent improvements seen in pupils' attendance so that no pupil group is disadvantaged by poor attendance.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the principal, executive principal, primary director of learning and a wide range of other senior and middle leaders. A video call with the chief executive officer (CEO) and deputy CEO and a meeting with four members of the local academy council also took place to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan and spent

time reviewing school documentation relating to: pupil assessment information; monitoring of teaching and learning; governance and attendance. I observed teaching and learning with you and the executive principal and I spoke to pupils and scrutinised their work. I also reviewed the checks that are made on the suitability of adults to work with children.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection you have become the principal, having previously been the head of school. The executive principal remains in post, but now carries out that role for another nine trust schools. An existing member of staff was appointed as the assistant principal following the promotion of the previous post holder. The local governing body is no longer in place and, instead, a joint academy council for three local trust schools has been formed.

## **Main findings**

Leaders have an ambitious vision for the school. Together as a team, you demonstrate your passion for creating a culture of excellence. You use your knowledge of staff and pupils to help everyone achieve and excel. Consequently, staff are highly motivated to take on leadership responsibilities. They are inspired by the open culture of support and development you have created.

Leaders work as a team, taking collective responsibility for improving pupils' outcomes and life chances. You are determined that every single child will succeed. Leaders are skilful in using the systems they have developed over time to enable this. High expectations and timely interventions are ensured by the weekly meetings, which identify if any pupil is falling behind and where a different approach might be needed. The response is almost immediate, which contributes to the speed of improvement which leaders have achieved.

Monitoring activities to check the quality of teaching and learning are carried out by a wide range of school leaders. They are supported effectively by trust leaders who work across a variety of schools. Joint monitoring and coaching are in place for leaders who have less experience. This professional development, along with their access to leadership development programmes and support from colleagues in other trust schools, means that leaders hone their skills and expertise in accurately identifying aspects of provision which require further attention.

You make sure that staff benefit from working in close partnership with the other local trust schools. As a result, staff use opportunities such as joint planning and moderation to support their work. Similarly, new and less experienced staff are placed with more experienced colleagues in year-group teams. This supportive culture means that staff are confident to ask for advice from other colleagues, and are keen to take risks and try out different approaches in their teaching.

You prioritise professional development for staff. For example, you make sure that all teaching assistants are included in training. Consequently, they have the same high expectations and awareness of the standards required when working with pupils. Expertise within the trust is used well to make sure that training is of high quality. The same key training is repeated for staff who are new to school to ensure high expectations and consistency in provision. Leaders are also vigilant in identifying any aspects of teaching which need further improvement. Their feedback and subsequent support are provided in a bespoke manner to meet the specific needs of the member of staff involved. In many cases, this entails senior staff modelling teaching approaches. Consequently, these development strategies are resulting in continual improvement of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Governors have a clear understanding about the impact of leaders' actions to address the areas for improvement from the last inspection. They recognise that school improvement has been building over time, has gathered momentum and is having an increasingly positive impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. Trust-wide systems and approaches, many of which are now well established, are resulting in the rapid improvements being made. Governors are knowledgeable about the school and use their responsibilities and expertise to provide appropriate challenge and support. However, they agree that having leaders provide them with analysis of persistent absence, for a wider range of pupil groups, will help them monitor the impact of strategies to improve attendance more precisely.

Leaders have created a positive learning environment which is inspiring and motivating to pupils. From the start of Nursery, staff focus on developing children's speech and language and love of books. Age-appropriate vocabulary is identified so that staff can focus on children's understanding of key language. Numerous activities are planned to give children opportunities to practise using and applying the skills they have learned in adult-led sessions. Partnership with parents is welcomed and encouraged and is used to promote the development of children's language. For example, a question of the day engages each child and parent in conversation.

As pupils move through key stage 1, resources are used effectively to support them in being successful with their writing. These resources help pupils to independently access the materials needed to be accurate in their use of spelling and grammar. Pupils' work is celebrated and displayed attractively throughout the school. Writing features prominently on these displays and demonstrates the broad curriculum which is in place. Topic-based learning and high-quality texts are often used to give purpose and interest to pupils' writing. This inspires them to produce writing which is of a high standard. For example, memorable activities, such as setting fire to a model of Pudding Lane, are used as a stimulus for pupils' writing.

There are clear expectations for pupils' handwriting throughout the school. Staff

insist on positive behaviours, such as the way pupils sit at a table, to support them in producing writing which they can be proud of. Throughout key stages 1 and 2, pupils are encouraged to explain their answers and develop their explanations when answering questions in class. The regular collaboration with other pupils helps them advance their ideas and supports them to use these sentence structures in their writing. Pupils respond well to the celebration of their efforts and take pride in working hard and challenging themselves.

Leaders have clear expectations for pupils' grammar, punctuation and spelling in each term of every year group throughout school. This means that all staff can focus on the most important aspects of the curriculum, based on pupils' age. Likewise, leaders' monitoring can focus on how effectively the curriculum is being implemented so that pupils grasp the most important knowledge to progress their learning.

A large proportion of pupils are disadvantaged and you and other leaders are determined that they achieve well. Progress meetings identify any potential barriers to pupils' learning. Support in breakfast club, or additional reading to adults in school, are examples of how potential barriers are eliminated.

As a result of developing leadership, pupils' outcomes have shown continued improvement over time. In 2018, progress by the end of key stage 2 was above average in reading and mathematics and was well above average in writing. Likewise, pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 2 has rapidly improved. From 26% of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined in 2016, this increased to 76% in 2018, which was above the national average. Disadvantaged pupils make strong progress and their attainment is usually in line with that of other pupils nationally.

You have raised the profile of the importance of good attendance and pupils say they want to be at school so they don't miss out on their learning. An attendance team manages pupils' attendance. Team members use their thorough knowledge of families, who they have built trusting relationships with, to help them identify the appropriate actions to take in each case. The increased use of penalty notices and the personalised and prompt response to non-attendance by the attendance team is starting to bring about improvements in attendance and reductions in persistent absence. Attendance has been slow to improve over time, but is showing much more rapid improvement this year. Groups of pupils, such as boys and those with special educational needs, who previously had high rates of persistent absence are now attending in line with pupils overall. The proportion of these groups who are persistently absent has almost halved this year, compared with the same period last year. You agree that, while there has been rapid improvement for these groups due to your focus on each individual pupil, it is now crucial that these improvements are sustained so that no pupil group is disadvantaged by poor attendance.

## **External support**

The extent of the support which staff frequently access as part of the multi-academy trust has been pivotal to the pace of development the school has achieved. Leadership development has been a priority and has resulted in a very positive culture of self-improvement. This, in turn, is resulting in continually improving outcomes for pupils. The impact of leaders' actions has become increasingly evident over time and is gathering rapid momentum.

I am copying this letter to 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 Stockton-on-Tees. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Godfrey  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**