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Mrs Leanne Mahony
Nechells Primary E-ACT Academy
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Dear Mrs Mahony

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Nechells Primary E-ACT Academy

Following my visit to your school on 25 June 2019, 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 October 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior leaders and the chief executive officer and regional director of the multi-academy trust. Together with senior leaders, I undertook short visits to several classrooms to observe pupils' learning and to look at work in pupils' books. A range of school documentation was evaluated, including the trust's statement of action, the school's action plans, the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks, minutes of meetings of the raising achievement board and records of the monitoring of teaching.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been several changes to leadership and teaching staff. A new deputy headteacher, special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), early years leader and leader for attendance and behaviour have been appointed. Five new teachers have taken up post.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You, other leaders and the trust are united in your drive to improve the school. You have successfully raised expectations of staff and pupils, which is bringing about improvements to the quality of teaching, pupils' progress and pupils' behaviour. Action plans focus tightly on the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. They set out clear priorities and precise actions. Leaders make regular checks on teaching to evaluate the difference these actions are making to pupils' learning.

The trust provides strong support and challenge for leaders and staff. It has been instrumental in recruiting staff with the right skills and expertise to address the school's weaknesses. Some of these staff have come with proven track records of success from other schools in the trust. Trust leaders undertake thorough reviews of teaching and learning each half term and provide detailed feedback to leaders and trustees. These reviews have prioritised the overall quality of teaching and the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The focus on challenge for the most able pupils and the teaching of reading and phonics has been less sharp. Staff have worked closely with colleagues from a partner school in the trust to improve their teaching and leadership skills.

The recently appointed SENCo is starting to drive improvements to provision for pupils with SEND. She has provided training to support staff in identifying these pupils' needs more accurately and delivering more structured intervention programmes. Learning support plans are in place with clear targets for each pupil, although some of these targets lack precision. Pupils with high-level needs now work in a small group with a specialist teacher each morning. Teachers are starting to plan work that matches the abilities of pupils with SEND more closely. However, this is not consistent across the school. In some classes, work is still too difficult for these pupils, which limits their progress and makes them over-reliant on adult support.

Systems are now in place to ensure the accuracy and reliability of teachers' assessments. Staff moderate their judgements with colleagues in the school, other schools in the trust and schools across the local authority. Leaders meet with staff to scrutinise pupils' progress and to look at the quality of work in pupils' books. They identify pupils who are not making the progress they should and put additional support in place to help these pupils to catch up. However, due to the legacy of poor teaching, gaps remain in the learning of all pupils. Although pupils' progress and attainment are improving, they are variable across classes because of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. The proportion of pupils working at the standards expected for their age in English and mathematics remains too low in most classes.

The new early years leader has prioritised improving the learning environment so that resources cover all areas of learning. Staff plan with colleagues from the

partner school. This ensures appropriate breadth in the curriculum. However, because topics are chosen by the partner school, they do not reflect the interests of children at Nechells closely enough. Teachers assess children's learning in writing and mathematics. They identify immediate next steps for children, for example, to practise letter formation. However, teachers do not make good enough use of what children already know and can do to plan future activities. Evidence of learning and assessment in other areas of the curriculum is sparse. Weaknesses in the choice of resources to support and deepen learning remain.

Teaching in key stages 1 and 2 has improved since the previous inspection. Clear 'non-negotiables' have brought about greater consistency in approaches to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers have responded well to the training and 'on-the-spot' coaching they have received. Those requiring more intensive support have made improvements to their teaching. Staff expect pupils to present their work neatly. Pupils have risen to this challenge and take pride in their work. However, in some classes, teachers do not routinely address inaccuracies in pupils' letter formation. Not all teachers model good practice in their own handwriting and some make errors in their spelling.

Leaders are developing a positive reading culture in the school. All classrooms have an inviting reading area where pupils can go to read. There has been investment in reading books and teachers encourage pupils to read at home each day. In key stage 1, lively and engaging phonics teaching means that more Year 1 pupils are working at the expected standard in phonics than has previously been the case. Daily reading sessions in all year groups focus on developing pupils' fluency and comprehension skills. However, across the school, the most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged, which means that too few of these pupils achieve the high standards of which they are capable.

In mathematics, middle- and high-attaining pupils have increasing opportunities to reason and solve problems. However, low-attaining pupils rarely get the opportunity to apply their mathematical understanding in this way. Starting points for the most able pupils are not always high enough. This means that these pupils spend time completing work they can already do, before moving on to work that is at the right level.

A new behaviour policy makes expectations of pupils' behaviour clear. It provides explicit guidance to staff about what their response to any inappropriate behaviour should be. Staff follow this process consistently. As a result, leaders' tracking information shows that pupils' behaviour is improving and there are fewer incidents of poor behaviour. Leaders' use of fixed-term exclusion is reducing because pupils who have difficulty managing their own behaviour are receiving effective support. However, where teaching is not well matched to pupils' needs, there are still times when pupils lose interest and distract their peers in lessons. Leaders acknowledge that the new behaviour policy needs to be available on the school's website for parents and carers to view.

Leaders have rightly prioritised improving the English and mathematics curriculum. As a result, work to develop the wider curriculum is in its infancy. Leaders have ensured that pupils in most year groups receive a broad curriculum, although in Year 6 the curriculum has remained too narrow. Staff have given thought to how they enrich the curriculum, for example through trips and visitors. However, teaching in subjects such as science, history and geography lacks depth. There is insufficient focus on the development of pupils' subject-specific skills.

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 action 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 E-ACT multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Claire Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector