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Mrs Catherine Gadd
Headteacher
Beacon Academy
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Dear Mrs Gadd

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Beacon Academy

Following my visit to your school on 16 December 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring 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 to improve the school 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 three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

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

The school should take further action to:

- improve the attendance of pupils, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged
- ensure that all subjects in the school's curriculum are planned logically to build pupils' knowledge over time.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, headteacher, three assistant headteachers who are also middle leaders, leaders for early years, the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator (SENDCo), two specialist leaders of education (SLEs) working for the trust to support staff, and the chair of the governing body, to discuss the actions taken since the last

inspection. The school improvement action plans were evaluated. I toured the school with senior leaders, conducted a scrutiny of pupils' work, considered leaders' whole-school curriculum planning, discussed leaders' procedures and records relating to pupils' behaviour, and considered the school's most recent published performance data.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes in the staffing and leadership of the school. An executive headteacher was appointed in January 2019. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2019. There is a new senior leadership team in place. A deputy headteacher has been appointed to start in January 2020. The early years provision has been restructured. Many staff are new to the school. An experienced chair of the local governing body was appointed this academic year.

Main findings

The trust has taken uncompromising actions to improve the school since the previous inspection. After a period of turbulence, it has addressed long-standing weaknesses in the leadership of the school. Senior leaders, including governors, are determined to drive improvements forward. They are establishing trusting, effective relationships with parents and carers and the local community. Leaders at all levels have an accurate and clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Although actions have taken longer to implement than hoped, leaders are taking the necessary steps to improve the school.

The executive headteacher and headteacher provide strong leadership. They ensure staff have the necessary skills and guidance to meet pupils' needs. This is having a positive impact on the quality of education the school provides. Leaders have established a focused programme of training and monitoring to support the professional development of all staff. They place sensible priority on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The trust provides good-quality support for staff to develop their expertise and improve their subject knowledge.

Many middle leaders are new to their roles. Consequently, improvements to middle leadership are ongoing. They have been given precise guidance from SLEs to support the development of their leadership skills. Some middle leaders are in the process of gaining middle leadership qualifications to further improve their expertise. They keep a sharp eye on the effectiveness of teaching and learning in their subject areas. They use assessment information appropriately to identify areas in need of improvement and hold teachers to account. They work alongside colleagues to model and share good practice.

The school's curriculum offers an appropriately wide range of subjects to inspire and motivate pupils to learn. Senior and middle leaders ensure that pupils can make

connections in their learning across subjects. However, not all subjects are planned so that pupils can build their knowledge sequentially. In some subjects, pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their independence and to practise and apply their knowledge in different ways.

Teachers use consistent approaches to teaching, including in reading, writing and mathematics. This has raised expectations for all pupils. Outcomes for pupils have improved in some areas of the school as a result. However, leaders are aware that the standard of education needs to improve further so that all pupils can achieve strong outcomes.

Provision for pupils with SEND has improved since the last inspection. A new, experienced SENDCo leads this area well with support from an SLE. A rigorous tracking system is in place. This helps the SENDCo to monitor provision for pupils, including those in the specialist resource provision. Additional support, resources and staff training are carefully planned and put in place to meet pupils' specific needs well. The SENDCo ensures governors are kept informed about the impact of additional funding for pupils with SEND. Governors use her termly reports to the governing body to ensure that pupils with SEND make good progress and are well cared for.

Leaders prioritise reading. Pupils are taught to read from Nursery Year. Leaders have improved the teaching of phonics. They have trained staff to ensure that pupils receive good-quality teaching. Scrutiny of pupils' books showed that pupils are developing their comprehension skills well. A new approach to the teaching of writing is now consistently embedded across the school. Pupils have regular opportunities to write independently, including in different curricular subjects.

Leaders have restructured the provision in early years. There is a consistent approach to planning resources and activities to meet children's needs. This includes children who attend the specialist resource provision. Children have appropriate and regular access to the outdoor areas. Ambitious plans are in place to further enhance the outdoor area for children through building work to extend and restructure the facilities.

Standards of pupils' behaviour across the school have improved. Leaders have introduced a new behaviour policy. This has ensured there is a consistent approach to the way staff manage pupils' behaviour. Staff record incidents of poor behaviour rigorously. Leaders carefully check these records to ensure that incidents are managed appropriately and pupils are supported to improve their behaviour. Leaders report that incidents of low-level disruption in lessons are increasingly rare.

Pupils' attendance has historically been low. At the last inspection, this was identified as an area for improvement. Leaders are taking appropriate actions to promote the importance of regular attendance. They work closely with parents and carers. They provide external support for families when needed. However, too many

pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged and pupils with SEND, are absent from school. A high proportion of pupils are persistently absent. Leaders know that actions to improve attendance need to be stepped up to ensure pupils are safe and attend school regularly.

The governing body has been instrumental in the many changes made to the school since the last inspection. Governors have a comprehensive understanding of their accountability for the school's performance. They work closely with trustees to secure improvements. They are knowledgeable and provide the headteacher with good levels of challenge and support to ensure the school improves.

Plans to improve the school are sharply focused. Members of the trust hold senior leaders to account for the impact of actions to improve the school. They ensure governors have a good understanding of the progress of leaders' actions. The chair of governors visits school regularly to check that actions are on track and having a positive impact on the school's performance.

External support

The trust has supported the school to improve. It has provided effective support through skilled leaders and specialists in education. The school has also worked closely with other schools within the locality and further afield with schools within the trust.

The support has been effective in enabling school leaders to act in the areas identified as needing improvement. Middle leaders feel empowered and appreciate the opportunities to develop their practice to secure good-quality education for all pupils. The headteacher has been well supported in her role and in her ambition to secure sustainable improvements for the school and its community.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's services for Leicestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephanie Innes-Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector