

12 July 2013

Mrs Wendy Arnell  
Principal  
St Helen's Primary Academy  
St Helen's Way  
Barnsley  
S71 2PS

Dear Mrs Arnell

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of St Helen's Primary Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on Wednesday 10 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the academy's predecessor school was judged to be a school causing concern.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the Principal and other leaders and managers at the academy, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, representatives of the academy trust, and spoke with some parents informally.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all pupils.

### **Context**

The academy opened on 1 December 2012. It has had several temporary staffing arrangements during the last year and this has remained the case since it opened as an academy. The number of pupils on roll at the academy is broadly average for primary schools. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average, as is the proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, including pupils with statements of special educational needs. A higher than average proportion of pupils enters and leaves the academy at times other than the usual.

## **Achievement of pupils at the academy**

The pupils' achievement is improving. There has been a very substantial improvement in the pupils' understanding of phonics (the sounds that words and letters make). This year, 84% of the pupils met the required standard. That compares with 14% in 2012 at the predecessor school. The academy's data indicate that there have been notable improvements also this year in the pupils' assessment results at the end of Key Stage 1, including in mathematics, which was a weakness previously at the predecessor school. The data indicate that the pupils' achievement at the end of Key Stage 2 this year is mixed, after notable improvements in 2012. However, the data indicate that a greater proportion of the pupils made the expected levels of progress in writing and mathematics than did so previously.

Differences between the achievement of different groups of pupils are reducing. The progress made by pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium (additional government funding) is improving and, in some instances, those pupils make better progress than others at the academy. The progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is still too variable, however, and not as good as that of other pupils.

The pupils enjoy learning and respond well when lessons are engaging and activities capture their interest. They concentrate well and stick to the tasks they have been given. As a result, when the teaching is of good quality, the pupils make good progress in the lessons.

## **The quality of teaching**

The proportion of good teaching is increasing, but there is still too much that requires improvement. There was no evidence of inadequate teaching. Important improvements in Key Stage 1 have resulted in better results in phonics and end-of-key stage assessments. The greater amount of good teaching is also enabling more pupils to make at least the expected levels of progress by the end of Key Stage 2.

The pupils told the inspectors that lessons have improved and are still getting better. The inspectors saw pupils working purposefully and productively in lessons that provided a variety of activities and when the teachers allowed nothing to go on for too long. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are included within lessons, often supported by teaching assistants, who enable the pupils to keep pace with the activities.

The inspectors saw some lessons in which the work set for the pupils was too easy and did not provide enough challenge to push the pupils to higher levels of learning. Whilst the teachers give thought to how the work needs to be different for particular groups of pupils, this is not always based carefully enough upon what they know about the pupils' current levels of learning and the levels they need to get to.

The quality of the marking of the pupils' work continues to vary too much. The inspectors saw examples of good marking in some books, which told the pupils how well they had done and gave them guidance on how to improve. In too many instances, however, the marking did not give the pupils a clear idea of how well they had done, or of what specifically was good and how they could improve. Similarly, in the lessons observed by the inspectors, the precision and quality of the comments made by teachers to the pupils about what they were doing varied. Consequently, the pupils knew sometimes what they had done well, but on other occasions, merely that they had pleased the teacher.

The pupils have good relationships with each other and with the staff. The quality of the relationships ensures that there is very little disruption to learning in lessons. On the few occasions when the inspectors observed that learning slowed because the teachers experienced a little difficulty getting a class to order quickly, it was usually because the pupils were motivated by the work they were doing and wanted to carry on. In a few instances, the pupils became fussy and frustrated because the teacher had not established clear routines for managing the pupils, so that, for example, pupils would call out answers to questions or talk at the same time.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The pupils' attendance is improving. At the time of this inspection, it was about average.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the academy**

The quality of teaching has improved because senior leaders and managers are making better use of data about the pupils' achievement to identify where teaching needs to be better. The senior leaders and managers have taken effective action subsequently to bring about necessary improvements, including by providing useful opportunities for the professional development of the teachers.

Senior leaders and managers and the governing body have a sharper knowledge and understanding of the pupils' achievement. They identify accurately the groups of pupils that do less well and have reduced the differences for some, such as those pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, but not all. They use the information well to reach accurate conclusions about how well the academy is doing.

The governing body has increased the level of challenge that it provides to the academy. It is well informed about the pupils' achievement, including those groups of pupils that are doing less well than others, and also about the quality of teaching in different parts of the school. It is questioning leaders and managers and other members of staff more frequently and rigorously about the work of the academy. That is helping to make sure that the staff, who respond positively, are focussed on the things that need to be improved, so that issues are dealt with more quickly.

The teachers with responsibilities for particular parts of the academy's work are taking greater control of and responsibility for their areas, which has contributed to the progress

made at the academy. They have begun to undertake a range of suitable activities to support the continued improvement of the academy. They are not yet having the full impact needed, because there is not a sufficiently systematic and frequent programme of such activities.

## **External support**

The staff respond well to external support and guidance, including the senior leaders and managers. The support provided initially after the academy opened concentrated on setting up new management systems and processes. Those processes are now starting to benefit the academy and have, for example, assisted leaders and managers in gaining a sharper understanding of the data on the pupils' achievement. The work of an academy improvement adviser provided by the Trust of which the academy is a part has helped to develop the skills of a wider range of leaders and managers, which has increased the academy's capacity to improve. There is no clear plan, however, for providing the level and type of support that the academy still needs in order to improve rapidly.

## **Priorities for further improvement**

- Plans for the development of the academy are detailed and focussed on the correct priorities. However, there is a need to ensure the planned actions in some parts of the plans are clearly linked with the academies targets for the pupils' achievement and that there are clear timescales for improvement.
- Increase the proportion of good teaching, sustaining the improvement made to date and reducing the amount of teaching that still requires improvement.
- Reduce the remaining differences in the achievement of groups of pupils, in particular for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.
- Ensure that the work set in lessons for different groups of pupils is always challenging and designed to help them get to higher levels.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mr Clive Moss  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

January 2012