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26 March 2014

Mrs Julia Gallagher
Principal
Epworth Primary Academy
Birchfield Road
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN9 1DL

Dear Mrs Gallagher

Special measures monitoring inspection of Epworth Primary Academy

Following my visit with Mary Lanovy-Taylor, Additional Inspector, to your academy on 25 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures, following the inspection which took place in February 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

The academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Isle Education Trust Board and the Director for People for North Lincolnshire.

Yours sincerely

Angela Headon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2013

- Improve teaching so all is at least good so that all pupils, including lower-attaining pupils, pupils with special educational needs and those supported through the pupil premium, make at least good progress, by:
 - making sure teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - making sure that teachers' provide practical and interesting activities that appeal to all pupils, but especially the lower-attaining boys in order that they remain interested and involved
 - providing pupils who need additional help with their learning with the right and timely support they need to make good progress in every class
 - supporting teachers to assess pupils' achievements accurately and use information about what pupils know already to plan work for them that is at the right level
 - making sure that teachers' marking identifies clearly what pupils have done well and what they need to do to improve their work, and that pupils are given the time to respond to this marking so that improvements can be made.

- Raise the attainment of all pupils in reading so that a greater proportion reach and exceed the nationally expected levels, by:
 - ensuring that pupils who have weak basic skills have the support they need to catch up quickly
 - making sure that pupils improve their spelling, particularly in Key Stage 2 ensuring that all pupils, but particularly the lower-attaining, read more regularly.

- Ensure that senior leaders and governors make urgent and rapid improvements by:
 - improving the provision which the school makes for pupils with special educational needs and those supported through the pupil premium by making sure their needs are identified quickly and their progress is checked regularly so that they do not fall behind.
 - taking swift action to deal with inadequate teaching
 - making rigorous checks on teachers' planning and the progress being made by pupils in every class
 - involving subject leaders regularly in checking that actions are leading to consistently good teaching
 - ensuring that assessment information is accurate
 - ensuring that all staff with leadership responsibilities have the skills they need to accurately check the impact of the actions being taken making sure that the governing body has a full picture and clear understanding of the school's performance and that they use this to hold senior leaders fully to account for their work.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 25 March 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised a range of documents and met with the Principal, senior leaders, teachers, pupils, members of the Isle Education Trust Board, including the Principal of South Axholme Academy, and a School Improvement Officer from the local authority.

Context

A new Principal started at the academy in January 2014. One class is taught by a part-time supply teacher and a permanent member of staff.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The academy has continued to tackle the inconsistency in the performance of key groups evident at the previous inspection. Through detailed analysis of data, collected every half term and well-targeted provision, some success in closing the gaps in achievement is already evident. This is particularly the case for pupils with additional learning needs, those supported by pupil premium funding and younger lower-ability pupils. Leaders are continuing to deal with the legacy of underachievement of older lower-ability pupils, notably boys. However, this remains an area for further improvement.

Overall, within year groups, the proportion of pupils making expected and in some cases, better than expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics shows an improving picture. This is particularly evident for pupils across Key Stage 2, with the strongest profile in reading. Similarly, the proportion of children on track to achieve a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage is currently above the national average and pupils in Year 1 are also making accelerated progress in literacy and numeracy. Pupils in Year 2 are starting to make up the lost ground from previous weaker teaching; however, leaders recognise there is still more to do to secure the expected levels at the end of the academic year.

In addressing previous weaker achievement in literacy, leaders have taken a robust approach with a sharper focus on extended writing, writing across the curriculum, spelling, punctuation and grammar. As a result, improvements are evident in pupils' workbooks and the academy's achievement data. A similar focus on mathematics is now required to ensure that there is no difference over time between the rate of improvement in attainment and progress between subject areas.

The quality of teaching

Through regular and rigorous monitoring, together with well-targeted training, the quality of teaching is continuing to show improvement, with a notable impact on the overall progress of a number of groups of pupils, including those with additional learning needs and those supported through pupil premium funding.

Inspectors observed effective teaching in the majority of lessons visited during the monitoring inspection. Teachers are developing a much better understanding of the attainment and progress of the pupils they teach, particularly within targeted groups. As a result, in the majority of classes, challenge was evident in the quality of questioning and in the range of activities set for individuals, groups and cohorts. Where this was not the case, lower ability pupils did not always make the same rate of progress as their peers.

Overall however, work is pitched at the right level, with appropriate practical resources that give pupils the opportunity to develop their thinking through group and paired discussion. This aspect of the academy's work has strengthened since the previous inspection. Teaching assistants are continuing to develop their role in supporting improvement and have benefited from targeted training.

Marking in workbooks has continued to support improvement, with helpful 'next steps' and time for pupils to respond. The introduction of target books in English and mathematics complements this work and is ensuring that pupils have a better understanding of how they can reach the next level. In discussion, pupils were very clear about their targets and the gap between their current achievement and their expected target.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

In lessons and during social times, pupils behave well. They show positive attitudes to learning and work very well with their peers. They enjoy their lessons and are keen to respond to questions, take part in discussions and complete the activities set.

Pupils feel safe in the academy and say that there are no behaviour issues or bullying. They understand the system of sanctions and rewards and are enthusiastic about the growing range of enrichment activities.

The importance of regular attendance is also well understood. The academy has ensured that attendance has continued to improve incrementally and remains above the national average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The new Principal has maintained the momentum and rate of improvement evident at the previous inspection in November 2013. She already has a secure grasp of what is required to accelerate further improvement in teaching and the outcomes for pupils. Consequently, the academy has continued to focus, with some success, on closing the achievement gap between targeted groups and their peers.

Collectively, senior leaders have also continued to develop their key roles, taking a greater responsibility in monitoring the academy's work and in leading staff training. This is particularly evident in aspects of literacy, numeracy and in reviewing the quality of provision for pupils with additional needs. The range and frequency of monitoring activities used to scrutinise pupils' and teachers' work, together with targeted training, are ensuring that the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils are improving overall. For example, the Principal has modelled good practice across the academy, extra teaching provision has been secured for Year 6 pupils and weekly meetings with teachers are securely focused on the impact of teaching on achievement, particularly for key groups.

The academy has continued to develop the curriculum, in readiness for the required changes, using a weekly thematic approach to ensure pupils have the opportunity to experience a full range of subjects across a planned cycle. Consequently, subject leaders, other than in English and mathematics, have completed a full audit of provision, with action plans in place, although this work is at an early stage of development.

Since the previous inspection, an advisory board has been established and one meeting has taken place. The board includes representation from the sponsor's full governing body, the Isle Education Trust Board. The Trust Board holds leaders to account through regular weekly meetings and members have completed written reports of visit, for example, about mathematics and the provision for pupils with additional needs. This is a move in the right direction, although the reports are not sufficiently evaluative of the impact of the academy's work in these areas.

External support

The academy sponsor and the local authority have continued to work in partnership to support the academy's work on the key priorities. Regular meetings between the sponsor and academy leaders are ensuring that this progress is kept under review. Overall, the sponsor's statement of action is now fit for purpose, but can be improved further in relation to expectations in mathematics. A school improvement officer, funded by the local authority, has supported the academy's leadership in developing their collective role in securing measurable improvements, particularly in literacy and in teaching.