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7 November 2014

Mrs Sandra Wiseman
Reaside Academy
Tresco Close
Frankley
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Dear Mrs Wiseman

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Reaside Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 6 November 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the sponsoring trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- continue to improve pupils' literacy skills, especially for the more able and especially with respect to spelling, punctuation and grammar across the academy
- raise the academy's targets for pupils' progress at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2015 to reflect the academy's higher ambitions
- ensure that, when leaders monitor the quality of teaching, their focus is always on the observed impact of teaching on the outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils
- increase the urgency of improvement actions by ensuring that development plans always specify timescales for actions, milestones and measurable criteria against which success can be measured

- continue to strengthen the effectiveness of governance by ensuring that the local advisory board action plan is implemented fully and reviewed regularly.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, pupils, and representatives of the Education Central Multi-Academy Trust to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The academy improvement plan was evaluated. I visited lessons briefly and looked at pupils' books on a tour of the academy. Documentation was scrutinised, including records of the outcomes of monitoring activities and performance management arrangements.

Context

A new substantive headteacher has been in post since September 2014. The senior team has been reconstituted with the appointment of two well-established teachers as assistant headteachers for a fixed term. Four new teachers, three of whom are newly-qualified, have been appointed since the last inspection, along with two teaching assistants.

Main findings

The headteacher has worked with considerable energy to bring about substantial improvement within a short time. She has set out a clear vision for engaging all stakeholders, including leaders, staff, pupils and parents, in the drive to improve pupils' achievement. In marked contrast to the situation at the last inspection, staffing is now settled, stable and cohesive. Parents have responded very well to initiatives to encourage them to play a greater part in their children's learning and in the academy's development. Pupils are more fully engaged in learning in lessons and in the wider life of the academy; this is as a result of new approaches to the management of their behaviour, and wider opportunities for them to participate in activities and contribute their views.

Teachers and teaching assistants have received well-focused training and support from academy leaders and the sponsor's specialist consultants to support and improve their performance. As a result, learning in most classrooms is purposeful and pupils work constructively together. Academy policies and procedures are implemented with consistent effect, so that teachers' marking is now consistently detailed and helpful in showing pupils how to improve. The curriculum has been effectively redesigned to reflect the new National Curriculum. Benefits are already evident in books with respect to more rigorous approaches to geography and history and a boost to science teaching. The system of assessment is in the process of transition. The new assessment system appears to have good potential to give pupils and teachers a clear understanding of the skills and knowledge that pupils should acquire in each year group.

Teachers in all years have recognised the need to ensure that students have secure basic skills in mathematics and literacy to make the progress they should. There is good evidence of effective methods in mathematics to reinforce pupil's calculation skills and to enable them to apply these to increasingly challenging tasks. The quality of pupils' writing is still too often diminished by poor spelling, punctuation and grammar; more able pupils are not always sufficiently careful in ensuring high standards of writing in all parts of their work.

Pupils' behaviour in most classrooms now makes a positive contribution to their learning. Pupils work well together, and most apply themselves with resilience to completing the task at hand. Some older pupils feel that behaviour in the playground is still on occasions too rough, although the much greater staff presence now ensures that problems are resolved.

Much work has been done to improve the physical environment of the academy, including by enclosing previously 'open-plan' teaching spaces to create individual classrooms. A very high standard of display of pupils' work reflects very well on the academy's strengths in the creative arts.

The academy's improvement plans set out in some detail the actions that new leaders are or will be implementing to address the issues raised at the last inspection, and to improve engagement with the community. However, the actions do not always have precise timescales, milestones or measurable criteria by which success can be measured. This makes the review of the success of the plans' implementation difficult. This is particularly the case with the action plan for the local advisory board. While it is clear that improvements have been made in identifying the strengths of the board and improving members' methods for engaging with the academy, there remains a number of areas to further improve, in terms of recruitment and training. Clearer timescales and a procedure for systematic review would improve the urgency of full implementation of the local advisory board improvement plan.

The new leadership team, including the special educational needs coordinator, has strengthened the focus across the school on measuring and monitoring pupil progress, including through the use of more transparent methods of presenting and sharing progress information. In monitoring the effectiveness of teaching, however, written feedback to teachers focuses too much on what the teacher did rather than its impact on outcomes for pupils. Whole school expectations for pupil progress by the end of the current academic year are too conservative to reflect the confidence of the academy to transform achievement rapidly.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The academy's sponsoring trust has deployed consultant support very effectively, particularly in supporting teachers new to the school and teaching assistants in approaches to and impact of teaching in literacy and numeracy. Regular whole-school monitoring by the academy's dedicated Challenge Advisor has provided clear and detailed feedback to the academy and trust on all aspects of the academy's progress under its new leadership. The academy has established links with other local schools to support a number of aspects of its work, including for more able pupils, although it is too early to judge the full impact of these programmes.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for insert local authority name and as below.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- DfE - Academies Advisers Unit [open.FREESCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk] - for academies, free schools, UTCs and studio schools