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14 November 2014

Mr M Frost
Headteacher
Meadow Park Academy
Norcot Road
Reading
RG30 6BS

Dear Mr Frost

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Meadow Park Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 13 November 2014, 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 which 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 July 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, other members of your senior leadership team, a representative from the academy sponsor, who is also now the Chair of the Governing Body, and a consultant headteacher. We completed short visits to classrooms together, during which I talked to pupils about their work, looked through pupils' books and observed what the pupils were learning. I reviewed a wide range of documentation, including minutes of governing body meetings, a review of the academy's use of the pupil premium grant and visit reports provided by external support. I was also able to evaluate the sponsor's statement of action and the school's action plan.

Context

Since the last inspection a new Chair of the Governing Body has been appointed, who is also the primary adviser for the academy sponsor, CfBT. The academy sponsor has commissioned the services of an experienced consultant headteacher to work with you and your senior leadership team for three days a week. There have

been a number of changes in teaching staff and you have employed two teachers who are newly qualified.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You and your leadership team have continued to take swift and effective action to improve the academy. You have taken a purposeful and systematic approach to tackling the issues identified in the previous inspection through the considered and detailed action plan you have written. Each section of the plan has clear, measurable success criteria through which you and your governing body can measure the impact of the work you are doing. This is well supported by the improvements that you have made to the performance management of teachers and how you monitor teaching and learning. You and your leadership team are now clearer about where improvements are making a difference and where there is still work to do.

Since the previous inspection there has been a high turnover of governors and the local governing body continues to be in a period of transition. The new Chair of the Governing Body brings a wealth of educational experience and has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy. There is already evidence of much greater challenge of leaders' work reflected in the minutes of governing body meetings.

Governors have commissioned an external review of how the pupil premium grant is spent at the academy. The outcomes of the review are, understandably, yet to be incorporated into the academy action plan. It is imperative that the report recommendations are added to the plan as soon as possible and that more is done to improve the achievement of pupils who are eligible for the grant.

The academy sponsor has made extensive and effective arrangements to support academy improvement. The brokering of a consultant headteacher to work alongside you has been particularly effective in developing your skills and those of your senior leadership team. Support has also been sourced from two local outstanding primary schools, both of which are led by National Leads of Education. This has brought opportunities for sharing effective practice from other schools with the teachers at your academy.

The sponsor's statement of action, however, is not fit for purpose. This is because it does not detail how CfBT will communicate its work with the academy to parents and carers, nor is there a clear plan that shows how CfBT will support the academy during the time it is in the serious weakness category. A revised statement of action should be completed before my next visit.

The impact of the improvements seen in leadership and management were visible during our short visits to classrooms. Pupils are already taking more pride in their work and taking care over how it is presented. There was very little evidence of low-

level disruptive behaviour seen during lessons and pupils were attentive to what they were doing. This is partly because teachers are now beginning to apply the academy's behaviour policy.

Although teachers are now applying the new marking policy, the quality of the feedback that we saw still varied. The next steps given were not always helpful for pupils to improve their work or to know what they need to do next. The quality of questioning in lessons also varied. There were some very strong examples seen, such as in a Year 4 mathematics lesson where pupils were learning to use a protractor. The teacher had given the pupils a range of problems to solve and, through careful questioning, helped them to work out how to solve them. However, in other lessons the questioning was too narrow and did not help pupils to think for themselves.

A number of lessons lacked purpose or did not make the most of time to help pupils to learn. For example, in a writing lesson, pupils had not been shown how to develop their writing skills before being asked to rewrite their own version of a traditional tale. This limited what they were able to do in the time they had been given. Lessons did not always capture the enthusiasm of pupils and they were not always sure about how the activities they were doing were helping them to learn. It is important that as you develop teaching further, you consider how the curriculum enthuses and engages pupils more, so there is greater purpose in what they do and better links between learning in different subjects.

You told me about a number of initiatives you have undertaken to improve the achievement of pupils in reading, particularly in the teaching of phonics. As yet, however, there is little evidence seen to show what difference this targeted focus has had on pupils' achievement. I will be interested to see what difference these initiatives are having on my next visit.

We did see, however, several examples of better challenge for more-able pupils in lessons. This was particularly effective in a Year 6 mathematics lesson in which pupils were learning to calculate the area of compound shapes. A group of three higher-attaining pupils had been challenged to calculate the area of three-dimensional nets. Working together, they challenged each other's thinking and came up with varying ways to solve the problems. As a result they effectively applied their understanding of calculating area in a way that also developed their problem-solving skills.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The sponsor's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Academies Advisers Unit at the DfE, the Education Funding Agency, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Reading and the CEO of CfBT. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Barnes

Seconded Inspector