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Mrs Tricia Davies
Headteacher
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Brayford Avenue
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Northamptonshire
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Dear Mrs Davies

Special measures monitoring inspection of Exeter – A Learning Community Academy

Following my visit to your school on 3 and 4 May 2017, 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 that have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2016.

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

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Emma Nuttall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2016.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management urgently, so that:
 - leaders identify the reasons why pupils are underachieving and so can take the right actions to ensure that the pupils make better progress
 - subject leaders have the knowledge and the opportunities necessary to bring about better teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility
 - pupils enjoy a broad curriculum and their skills and knowledge in every subject grow as they move through the school
 - leaders provide accurate reports to governors about the school's performance
 - governors have the skills and confidence to hold leaders to account and to bring about school improvement
 - pupil premium funding is used effectively
 - the school's website meets requirements.
- Improve outcomes for all pupils and raise the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - using information about the pupils' performance and the quality of teaching to provide effective training where it is required, particularly in the teaching of mathematics and reading
 - ensuring that the most able pupils receive work that is challenging and enables them to attain high standards
 - ensuring that teachers use lesson time efficiently and give pupils work that enables them to make at least good progress in all subjects
 - giving pupils plenty of opportunities to use and to develop their writing skills throughout the curriculum.
- Improve the quality of teaching and leadership in the early years by:
 - ensuring that leaders responsible for the early years make regular and robust checks on the quality of teaching and assessment in the Reception classes
 - ensuring that all necessary training is provided to secure better provision in the Reception classes
 - sharing the good practice evident in the Nursery.
- Improve pupils' personal development, welfare and behaviour by reducing the rates of absence and persistent absence.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 3 May 2017 to 4 May 2017

Evidence

The inspector met with the interim principal, the vice-principal, the chief executive of the Woodnewton Academy Trust and the chair of the local governing body. The inspector visited every class, evaluated pupils' work and listened to pupils read. She met with newly qualified teachers and their mentor. She interviewed the English and mathematics leaders, the early years and pupil premium funding leader and the leader for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The inspector spoke with pupils to gauge their views about the school. The statement of action, the school improvement plan and the English and mathematics subject plans were also evaluated. She considered the school's most recent attainment information of pupils. Documentation relating to pupils' attendance and the single central record were also evaluated. The inspector also scrutinised information relating to the monitoring of teaching and learning, and the external reviews of governance and the pupil premium funding. The local authority's early years monitoring visits reports and the Department for Education monitoring visit report were also considered.

Context

Since the inspection in November 2016, there have been significant changes to staffing at the school. The principal resigned and the position was temporarily covered by the principal of Woodnewton Academy, who is also the chief executive of the trust. The new interim principal was appointed in the spring term. A vice-principal from Woodnewton Academy has been seconded to the school. Since January 2017, a special educational needs leader and mathematics leader have been appointed. An experienced teacher has been appointed to support pupils who have specific behavioural needs in key stage 2. One teacher has left the school. A new headteacher has been appointed to start in September 2017.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders and governors, including representatives of the academy's sponsor, have not taken effective action since the Ofsted inspection in November 2016. Consequently, too many pupils are not making the progress they should and the school is not improving at an acceptable rate.

The instability of staffing has contributed to leaders not successfully improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school. This has been addressed very recently by the appointment of a new interim principal. Through her astute leadership, she has quickly identified the school's priorities and what is needed to urgently address the standards at the school. She has successfully garnered the support of a new leadership team and is providing them with clear direction on what is needed to improve all areas of the school.

The principal and other staff have visited another school to gather ideas so that Exeter's curriculum can be developed. The principal has provided staff with appropriate training and planning time to support the implementation of the new curriculum, which is still in the early stages of development.

Overall, the effectiveness of the middle leadership has increased since January 2017. Middle leaders are knowledgeable about what needs to be done to improve standards at the school and they have appropriate milestones in place on their subject leader plans. For example, the English lead has reviewed the whole-school reading policy to ensure that pupils read regularly and have books appropriate for their ability. The principal acknowledges that these actions now need monitoring to ensure that they are having a positive impact on improving outcomes for pupils.

Middle leadership training is now in place for the mathematics and English leaders so that they can further develop their knowledge, skills and confidence in leading their subject areas.

Overall, the governing body has not been effective in addressing the school's priorities. There was an external review of governance in February 2017. The governing body is now aware of the urgency needed to address the points highlighted in the report so that they become effective in performing their roles and ensuring that standards improve at the school. The governing body is also aware it is not fulfilling its role for scrutinising the pupil premium funding effectively. A local leader of education was commissioned to review the pupil premium funding in March 2017 to address this. This has taken too long to implement.

The school's website does not meet requirements because the pupil premium funding information does not show the impact of expenditure allocated to these pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Pupils are not making the progress that they should. Teachers' expectations are too low. They do not use pupil information sufficiently well to plan appropriate learning activities that meet the needs of all pupils.

For example, in mathematics, the most able pupils and those pupils of average ability are not challenged enough in lessons and find the activities too easy. Consequently, these pupils are not making the progress of which they are capable.

In English lessons, pupils are not given tasks so that they are able to practise their writing skills and make at least good progress over time in this key subject. Pupils are not given opportunities to develop their writing stamina. They often write short pieces and do not develop their ability to structure and practise their writing skills. Consequently, pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Where teaching is effective, teachers are developing the curriculum and using opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills. For example, pupils used the school's tablets to investigate facts about a Commonwealth country. Pupils enjoyed the task and were supported well by the class teacher to structure their investigations and phrase their findings appropriately, so they could then answer questions on their chosen country.

The effective practice in the Nursery has been spearheaded by a strong early years Nursery leader and a well-trained team. The Nursery environment is bright and interesting and children make a strong start there. It is well resourced with a range of activities that are continually developed to maintain the children's interests.

The trust has seconded an early years practitioner to address the areas for improvement in the Reception classes. The impact since the last inspection has been minimal upon children's achievements and actions have not been implemented quickly enough. The checks on the quality of teaching and learning have not been regular and robust enough to improve the quality of teaching and learning. There has been insufficient training in place to improve the Reception classes to date.

Nursery staff have delivered some support to the Reception classes to help improve the outdoor provision and develop positive attitudes to learning in the Reception classes. However, this has not yet improved the provision.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The overall attendance of pupils is below the national average and the rate of persistent absence is high, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school rewards good attendance and teachers are promoting it in their classes. The principal holds weekly meetings with the attendance officer to track attendance carefully. The attendance officer meets frequently with parents and undertakes home visits. School information shows that attendance and persistent absence are improving over time, but are still not in line with national averages.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' outcomes in the statutory tests at the end of key stage 2 in 2016 were particularly low in reading and mathematics. However, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in writing was better and only just below the national average. The proportion of pupils who achieved at a higher standard in reading and mathematics was well below the national average. No pupil achieved a high standard in writing. The proportion of pupils who exceeded the expected standard in English grammar, spelling and punctuation was also below the national average at the end of key stage 2.

In key stage 1, pupils' outcomes at the expected level for reading, writing and mathematics were above the national averages in 2016.

The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 was broadly average. The proportion of pupils who achieved a good level of development at the end of the early years was below the national average.

Teachers are making assessments of pupils' learning and have had some opportunity to moderate their judgements with other schools. However, this is a recent action and leaders are not yet confident that all of the teachers' judgements are sufficiently accurate.

The school is expecting a proportion of pupils in line with last year's national average to reach the expected standard in the phonics check in Year 1.

In the early years, the teachers' latest assessments show that the proportion of children on track to reach a good level of development is just below the previous year's national average.

External support

The Woodnewton Academy Trust has been ineffective in supporting the school. It has fallen short of its duty to the school to ensure that the urgent improvements needed for pupils take place. It has not provided timely support and the pace of improvement has been too slow for some time. Consequently, pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and learning has been inadequate for some time. There is an urgent need for the trust to support the principal in securing a stable and high-calibre team so that improvements can be addressed urgently and at a greater pace.

The trust has seconded a vice-principal from a school within the trust to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the early years. However, the staffing instability has resulted in the vice-principal having far-reaching responsibilities across the school and this has hampered her capacity to deliver improvements.

The trust has arranged support from an external consultant to assess the school's progress at key points throughout the year and to work alongside the principal to evaluate the school's progress towards improving all areas of the school.

A part-time consultant was in post at the school for some of the spring term to help manage pupil assessment information. The impact of her actions is unclear. Recently, the trust has implemented opportunities for early years moderation and Year 2 moderation across the schools in the trust to check on pupils' progress. This has happened too late and there have been missed opportunities for developing teachers' expertise across the trust's schools.

A mathematics consultant is working with the school to train and develop teachers' knowledge, skills and expertise so that the quality of teaching and learning can be improved. It is too early to see the impact of this training.