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Dear Mrs Tayler,

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Market Harborough Church of England Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 9 November 2017, 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 May 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement, identified at the recent section 5 inspection, in order to become a good academy.

The academy should take further action to:

- ensure that leaders, including governors, have an accurate view of how the pupil premium funding is allocated and monitored in order to accelerate the progress of the most able disadvantaged pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, senior leaders responsible for English, mathematics and the early years, four members of the governing body including the chair, a group of pupils and the chief executive of the trust, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A range of documentation was scrutinised, including school improvement plans, the most recent information on pupils' progress and attainment, a range of pupils' mathematics workbooks and documents relating to safeguarding. I conducted a tour of the school with you and the deputy headteacher, and visited all classes to see pupils and staff at work. I spoke with pupils as they worked and at lunchtime. I also spoke with several parents at the beginning of the school day.

Context

Since the previous inspection, three teachers have left the school. New leaders responsible for curriculum design, teaching and learning, special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils have been appointed.

Main findings

You, the senior leaders and the governing body have responded swiftly to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The school development plan sets out clearly when specific actions are to be taken and by whom. The actions are further broken down into rapid improvement plans. These plans ensure that staff and governors focus sharply on the immediate priorities every half term. Governors monitor the progress of these plans carefully. They are, therefore, able to hold you and other school leaders fully to account.

You have introduced an effective system enabling teachers to accurately assess pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. During the inspection, I observed many examples of adults recording pupils' achievements during lessons. Teachers ask 'hinge questions'. These questions enable them to decide which pupils are ready to move on to more challenging work and which require extra support. For example, in a Year 2 mathematics lesson some pupils had successfully added 10p onto their shopping list items. They were then challenged to add 30p.

Teachers compare examples of pupils' work in moderation meetings with other schools, and pupils undergo formal testing every term in reading and mathematics. These tests and moderation exercises help to ensure that teachers' ongoing assessment judgements are accurate.

Teachers keep comprehensive assessment files that contain records of pupils' progress. Individual pupils are discussed with either yourself or another senior leader at regular pupils' progress meetings. Here, any pupil who is falling behind is identified and quickly given the help they need to catch up. This work has ensured

that teachers have an accurate picture of pupils' abilities. Work is, therefore, now well matched to pupils' abilities and is sufficiently challenging.

Increasingly accurate assessment information is enabling you to analyse the performance of different groups of pupils across the school. For example, you were able to share with me the strong progress made by boys, girls and disadvantaged pupils currently in Year 4.

The mathematics leader has overseen improvements in the planning, delivery and frequency of problem-solving and reasoning activities. Pupils from key stage 2 told me they enjoyed these activities. One pupil gave me an example of a challenging activity they had recently completed, 'If the perimeter of the shape is 24cm, what are the lengths of the sides?' Sometimes, these problems are verbal extension activities that challenge pupils to explain how they have arrived at a particular answer.

Teachers in the early years are strengthening children's understanding of number. Time is taken to explore each number and examine its properties in detail. For example, I observed children engrossed in an activity sorting pictures of objects that had links with the number four. Children will then go on to examine shapes with four sides, count different objects up to four, explore how to make four and learn to recognise four o'clock.

Teachers' performance management objectives are now more thorough. They are closely linked to the progress of pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. Subject leaders also receive specific leadership targets. These identify the numbers of pupils who should achieve at expected levels and beyond, across the school.

You undertook an external review of the use of the pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils. This helped you to assess how this aspect of leadership and management could be improved. As a result, the deputy headteacher wrote an effective action plan that contains appropriate targets, outcomes, timescales and monitoring opportunities. Consequently, the proportions of disadvantaged pupils who achieved at expected levels and beyond in reading, writing and mathematics increased significantly last year. We agreed that you would now examine more closely how this funding impacts on the progress and attainment of the most able disadvantaged pupils.

The well-trained and experienced governing body knows the school well. Minutes of governing body meetings show clearly that governors are challenging leaders about the performance of different groups of pupils. Governors are also visiting the school in order to find out first hand which aspects are working well and which need further development. Governors write reports after these visits and give feedback to other governors at meetings. Consequently, all governors have a good overview of the school's strengths and areas for development.

The school's arrangements for recruiting and checking staff before they start working at the school are rigorous and meet current requirements. Procedures for staff to report any concerns they have regarding a pupil's welfare are clear and well established. Records are kept securely and are in good order. Pupils and their families who require extra support from outside agencies receive it promptly.

Parents with whom I spoke were overwhelmingly positive about the school. Many of them told me that their child is happy, safe and making good progress.

External support

The school is receiving good support from the trust. The chief executive has supported leaders with implementing the assessment system and moderating judgements on the quality of teaching. The trust has provided appropriate training for leaders, teachers and governors.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Stonier

Her Majesty's Inspector