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Mrs L Chambers-Wardman
Headteacher
Charles Cuddy Walker Academy
Derby Street
Walsall
WS2 7BH

Dear Mrs Chambers-Wardman

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Charles Cuddy Walker Academy.

Following my visit to your academy on 4 December 2015, 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 March 2015. 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 school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. The academy's improvement plans were evaluated and other documents, including the minutes of governing body meetings were scrutinised. Information about how the academy keeps children safe was analysed and the academy's summary of outcomes for pupils was evaluated. Visits were made to every classroom with the headteacher and books and displays were also looked at during this time.

Context

Since the inspection in March, the acting-headteacher has become the substantive headteacher. A full-time deputy headteacher, who is also the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo), has also been appointed. One teacher and two supply teachers have left the academy and two teachers and a supply teacher have replaced them. A new teacher will join in January.

A new sponsor has also been approached to replace the Erudition Schools Trust next term.

Main findings

The headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, has taken effective action to improve the academy. Her high expectations of all staff and pupils has led to better teaching and pupils currently in the academy are making improved progress in all year groups.

Staff enjoy productive relationships with the pupils, who are responding positively to the high expectations. All staff follow the academy marking policy, which helps pupils improve their literacy skills as well as their subject specific knowledge and understanding. Work is marked regularly to celebrate achievement and comments made by teachers give pupils clear next steps on how to improve their work. As pupils respond to marking in a very positive manner, this allows them to make improved progress.

Classrooms and corridors are brightened by high quality, well looked-after displays of pupils' work. Pupils are taking pride in their work and there is evidence on the walls and in books of well-presented written work, improved spelling, punctuation and grammar and extended pieces of writing. Pupils are now being given opportunities to write at length in many subjects.

Staff are now using accurate information about individual pupils to plan activities to challenge pupils of all abilities. Teachers have high expectations of all pupils, for example, the work seen during the inspection excited their interest and inspired pupils of all abilities to produce imaginative writing.

Academy leaders have taken effective action to improve pupils' reading skills and all pupils are encouraged to enjoy reading. A range of books are available and the academy has adopted a more consistent and effective approach to the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make). Pupils of all abilities have strategies to decipher words that are unfamiliar to them. For example, after reading to me, a confident reader explained she worked out what a few words said and a younger reader used the sounds that letters make to read some words.

The teaching of mathematics is also improving, resulting in better progress throughout the academy. The subject has improved resources but academy leaders are aware that the quality of teaching in mathematics is not as strong as the teaching of English. Pupils in some classes are not solving mathematical problems in different subjects and not all pupils are given the opportunity to think deeply about mathematics. This means that progress is not as rapid as it could be.

The system for monitoring the quality of teaching is now embedded and the process used to manage the performance of teachers is effective. Teachers are set appropriate targets linked to the Teachers' Standards, the academy's needs, the quality of teaching and the outcomes for pupils. The process which is now in place allows academy leaders to have a clear understanding of a teacher's strengths and areas for development and plan appropriate training when required. As a result, teachers have taken part in a number of activities, including observing the best practice in an outstanding teaching school, in order to help them improve. Plans are also in place for the sharing of good teaching practice within the academy.

The roles and responsibilities of middle leaders have been developed since the last inspection. Some leaders are driving improvements in their areas but this is not consistent. Senior leaders are aware of this and have plans in place for additional support and training as required.

Pupils were exceptionally polite and well behaved during the visit. They listened carefully in class and followed instructions. They did not let the excitement of the Christmas Fayre, which took place during the inspection, interfere with their learning. Information provided by the academy indicates that the number of playground incidents has reduced and that the behaviour system is now being used more consistently. However, academy leaders are aware that behaviour at lunchtime does not match that at playtime and they are taking action to address this.

Parents continue to be supportive of the work of the academy. Attendance has improved and events, such as the Christmas Fayre and subject specific workshops for parents and children to attend together, have brought many parents into the academy. Staff also communicate with parents through letters and phone calls but the academy's website does not reflect what is going on in the academy now and academy leaders intend to update it once the new sponsor is in place.

Governors are very supportive of academy leaders and minutes of governing body meetings indicate some challenge. They have taken part in relevant training and the Chair of the Governing Body has attended meetings with the sponsors and the local authority to hold the headteacher to account. As governors are now linked to subject areas, visit the academy regularly and receive accurate information from the headteacher, they have a clearer picture of the strengths and weaknesses in the academy.

After an audit of governance was carried out by a national leader of governance in the summer term 2015, an action plan was devised. However, as a result of the proposed change in sponsor, some of the actions, such as reconstituting the governing body, have not taken place. This has slowed down the development of the governing body.

External support

The local authority has continued to support and challenge academy leaders. A link officer has attended the regular meetings with the sponsors and the Chair of the Governing Body to hold the headteacher to account and monitors the academy's progress through other visits. The local authority has also moderated assessment information.

The academy has also received support from the Hales Valley Teaching School. A deputy headteacher was seconded from the alliance for three days a week last term and they have also provided support with assessment, moderation and staff training. Academy leaders told me that this has helped to improve the quality of teaching, raise expectations and helped to provide more robust assessment information.

The Erudition School Trust held regular meetings to hold the headteacher to account and secured additional funding for playground equipment.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Walsall.

Yours sincerely

Simon Mosley

Her Majesty's Inspector