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Mr Chris Walton
Pathways E-ACT Primary Academy
Raisen Hall Road
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S5 7NA

Dear Mr Walton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Pathways E-ACT Primary Academy.

Following my visit to your academy on 1 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 June 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. The academy should take further action to:

- sharpen improvement planning to ensure that lines of accountability and time frames are clearly defined and the intended impact on pupils' learning and achievement is transparent
- equip subject leaders with the skills needed to monitor and manage their roles and responsibilities robustly and with greater understanding.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, pupils, the governing body, a local authority representative and E-act's regional director for the north to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated academy improvement plans including subject action plans, and reviewed a range of academy information, for example governors' files and monitoring records. We visited classes

in Key Stage 2 together with the vice-principal and I met with a group of teaching assistants. I spoke with several parents and conducted work scrutinies with you and English and Mathematics leaders.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a new Principal has been appointed, taking up post in September 2015. The leadership group has been re-structured with the vice-principal and assistant vice-principal now holding non-class-based roles. A new mathematics leadership role has been created and filled. Nine teachers have left and nine new teachers have been recruited. Of these, five were newly qualified teachers, four of whom have remained in post. Other changes have been made in relation to pastoral and administrative positions.

Main findings

Academy leaders, the multi-academy trust partners and governors are realistic and honest about the academy's current effectiveness. All agree and understand that a considerable amount of work will be needed to get the academy to good. However, strategic improvement planning rightly focuses on recommendations from the previous inspection report and there are clear indications that progress is being made. You have carefully sculpted a platform from which to move forward.

In restructuring the senior leadership team, you have achieved an immediate impact to better support improvements in teaching. Having been freed up to work alongside teachers and support staff regularly, leaders now model teaching, support planning and guide practice. With this intensive support, the quality of teaching and learning in Key Stages 1 and 2 is steadily improving.

There has been a carefully thought through focus on strategies to improve teaching. Staff are being supported to grasp the links between good teaching, good behaviour and good outcomes for pupils. This is beginning to have a positive impact on teachers' abilities to reflect on and shape their own strengthening practices across subjects, and is inculcating a depth of understanding about what 'good' looks like.

All staff value the consistent messages you deliver, for example around behaviour. Shared signals across classes for 'stop, look and listen' are firmly established and the five behaviour sanctions are clearly understood by staff and pupils. Consequently behaviour is improving. You and staff agree with pupils that this needs to develop further in order to ensure that teaching time is optimised, as some instances of poor behaviour continue to interrupt learning.

Subject leaders are enthusiastic and share the vision of senior leaders. The coaching system you have implemented is building competencies. Leadership skills, however, are embryonic and require further developing and embedding. For example, subject

action plans, like the academy improvement plan, are currently overly descriptive rather than quantifiable.

Senior leaders' high expectations are being communicated openly and with consistency. For example, performance management meetings this term for both teaching and non-teaching staff have been welcomed by all as an opportunity to discuss and plan personal development journeys. Challenged and supported in this way, staff feel valued, are clear about their individual development needs and are actively seeking to improve their practice.

Training has focused on the correct priorities and is leading to staff wanting to know and find out more about what makes teaching particularly effective. For example, support staff now have regular weekly training sessions, delivered by leaders. This is ensuring that collective and individual needs can be identified, planned for and acted on.

The E-ACT multi-academy trust offers regular challenge for academy leaders. Non-negotiables have been clearly spelled out to leaders with end-of-year expectations, in terms of improvements and outcomes, transparent. There are frequent visits to the academy by the E-ACT regional director of education for the north, and partnership working across academies in the multi-academy trust to facilitate improvements in teaching and learning.

Governors are skilled and fully involved with the work of the new Principal with challenging questions logged during meetings. Governors have always been supportive but have recently increased the level of challenge to academy leaders as they understand that previously they accepted rather than questioned aspects of leadership. Governors articulate an accurate understanding of the academy's position and improvement priorities.

You are instilling in others raised expectations of what pupils can achieve and have established clear non-negotiable 'musts' for staff in order to realise your expectations. By way of example, teachers are applying the academy's marking and feedback policy, with its 'Fix It Five' response time for pupils, with more consistency, particularly in English. This consistency is not, however, visible across the curriculum: the presentation and work in books other than English and mathematics is of poorer quality.

The pupil premium review indicates that funding is used to good effect and is having an impact on improvement. The academy acknowledges that close monitoring of disadvantaged pupils must continue to ensure that gaps across year groups and subjects close rapidly.

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

External support

The E-ACT multi-academy trust supports and challenges academy leaders robustly and has established cross-academy working. Further cross-academy sessions are planned, with staff moving between the settings to observe and share good practice. The academy has also elected to make use of the local authority's school-to-school partnership working, for example in securing training that is contributing to the development of subject leader roles. The governing body has made use of the expertise offered by the trust, for example to shape the recruitment process, prior to the Principal's appointment.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for South Yorkshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Manuel
Her Majesty's Inspector