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Jason Osprey  
Firbeck Academy  
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Dear Mr Osprey

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Firbeck Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 22 May 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 school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2016. 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.

The school should take further action to:

- embed strategies already in place to further improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and to share best practice
- ensure that staff consistently manage pupils' behaviour around the school, particularly at lunchtime
- develop the consistency of practice in the early years setting.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders, a representative of the trust and members of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I spoke with a group of pupils informally and with other pupils in their lessons. Together we visited six classrooms to see the pupils at work. I also visited the school's nurture provision. I considered a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding and monitoring activities. I also considered the school's action plans. I spoke to a number of parents at the start of the day. I scrutinised a sample of pupils' work from a range of subjects.

## **Context**

At the time of the last inspection, the school was part of the Nottingham University Samworth Academy Trust. In April 2017, the trust amalgamated with the Nova Education Trust. Since the last inspection, one class teacher has left. This class is being taught by a temporary member of staff.

## **Main findings**

Since the last inspection, you, ably supported by the deputy headteacher and executive headteacher, have taken effective action to begin to bring about the required improvements to the school. You have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have amended improvement plans to ensure that the key priorities are addressed. This means that all staff understand your vision and aims. You have communicated raised expectations of staff and pupils' performance and these permeate all that you do. You have also ensured that your monitoring activities are more rigorous than they have been in the past. Your evaluation of the school's work is thus more robust and is enabling you to bring about sustainable improvements.

You took swift action to commission a review of the use of pupil premium funding throughout the school, including in the early years setting, as recommended by the last inspection. This review identified the need to sharpen the means by which the effectiveness of this funding is evaluated. You have introduced a new tracking system which provides greater clarity and has enabled you to ensure that disadvantaged pupils' specific needs are identified and that appropriate additional support is provided. You have also ensured that disadvantaged pupils throughout the school are given greater focus in leaders' monitoring activities, such as in work scrutinies and pupil progress meetings. This means that staff are held to greater account for the progress of this group of pupils. Specific targeting strategies have been incorporated into teachers' day-to-day practice, for example through the approach to assessment and targeted questioning in lessons. Your current tracking indicates that disadvantaged pupils, including those in the early years setting, are making greater progress than in the past.

You have made good use of the school's means for staff appraisal. All staff now have measurable targets against which their performance is assessed. You have also introduced greater clarity over expectations of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that staff are clear about how you will measure their effectiveness. Interim reviews evaluate staff performance against these targets and you ensure that processes are in place to challenge staff who are at risk of failing to meet expectations. Subsequent support packages, including coaching and leadership support, have been effective in improving teachers' practice.

You have supported improvements to the leadership of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You have made changes to teaching responsibilities which have enabled the special educational needs coordinator to take greater responsibility for the leadership of this aspect of the school's work. Supported by the executive headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator has worked closely with class teachers to ensure that individual pupils' needs are identified and understood. The school's new progress-tracking system has further supported this work and leaders are able to monitor pupils' progress, intervening as appropriate.

The special educational needs coordinator has also developed the 'nurture' provision for pupils who had previously struggled to cope in their main class. Pupils spend a proportion of each day working in very small groups, supported by trained staff, to meet their social and emotional needs while also working on key aspects of the curriculum, such as English and mathematics. Your internal tracking information indicates that these pupils are making extremely good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Their behaviour has also improved considerably and they are now more settled when they re-join their classes.

Since the last inspection, the deputy headteacher has taken greater responsibility for the leadership of the early years area. She has, rightly, identified inconsistencies in the quality of provision. For example, learning journals are used to track children's progress more effectively in the Reception class than in the Nursery. She has ensured that monitoring is more rigorous and is supporting staff to collaborate and share best practice across all aspects of the setting. As a result of her leadership, the quality of provision is improving. However, ensuring greater consistency remains a priority.

The last inspection identified the need to raise expectations of what pupils are able to achieve, particularly in relation to reading and writing. You have ensured that there is greater clarity of leadership responsibility for driving improvements in these areas, and considerable work has been undertaken to promote reading and to develop pupils' literacy skills. Pupils have shared that they did not like the reading materials that were previously available to them so leaders have invested in a wide range of reading material that better suits pupils' interests and needs. Leaders have also introduced a 'reading buddy' scheme where pupils support and share each other's reading. In addition, parents of children in Nursery are encouraged to

support their children's reading development through the 'book share' initiative where pupils select a book to take home and read with their parents. Parents I spoke to said that they appreciated these opportunities to support their children's development.

To drive through these changes, you have introduced far more rigorous monitoring of pupils' reading. For example, teachers monitor closely the level of books that pupils are reading, ensuring that they are reading materials that are suitably challenging. Pupils told me that their teachers help them to find appropriate books and do not allow them to choose books that are 'too easy'. You have amended the pupil-organiser diary to highlight the expectation that pupils also read during holiday periods and at weekends. Teachers use this to monitor the frequency with which pupils read at home, also checking the appropriateness of texts.

Leaders have carried out an audit of comprehension activities across the curriculum and incorporated explicit opportunities to develop pupils' reading skills. In addition, they have introduced a new comprehension skills programme which supports the development of information retrieval and interpretation skills. Staff have received training to develop a consistent approach to developing these aspects of learning, and further training, to be provided by an external expert, is planned for the autumn term. In addition, the reading scheme that was introduced in key stage 1, in September 2016, is promoting better teaching and learning. Pupils' progress in reading is improving, and a greater proportion of younger pupils is now making better progress than in recent years.

Leaders have shared their expectation that teachers ensure a greater focus on developing pupils' vocabulary through reading, writing and speaking activities. For example, during the inspection children in the Reception class were exploring synonyms to describe the size of a giant's house. The amended pupil-organiser diary provides further opportunities to develop vocabulary through the identification of 'tricky words'. Leaders recognise that this is not yet used consistently throughout the school.

Leaders have adapted curriculum plans to ensure that there are more opportunities for pupils to practise writing for extended periods across the curriculum. Work in pupils' books indicates that pupils throughout the school are beginning to benefit from these changes. For example, pupils in Year 2 had written their findings of a scientific experiment in continuous prose and pupils in Year 6 had written extended non-chronological accounts.

You have made use of opportunities provided by the trust to share good practice. For example, moderation activities of standardised tests have supported teachers' ability to assess more accurately, which has raised their expectations of what pupils are able to achieve. This, in turn, has meant that pupils are being challenged more effectively across the curriculum. Pupils' books show many activities which are

appropriately challenging. However, leaders are aware of the need to ensure greater consistency in this aspect of the school's work.

The last inspection identified the need to encourage pupils to take more pride in their work. Again, raised expectations, shared with staff and pupils, are evident in pupils' books. Work is generally well presented and books are well kept. Pupils say that their teachers expect them to present work neatly and to do their best at all times.

Raised expectations of pupils' behaviour, and a shared understanding of those expectations among staff, have meant that behaviour in classrooms has improved. Your monitoring indicates far fewer instances of low-level disruption and in the classes we visited during the inspection pupils were generally focused and engaged. You have sharpened the behaviour management system and pupils understand the clear and logical system of rewards and consequences. They say that their learning is not affected by poor behaviour in classrooms and that their teachers expect them to behave well. They also appreciate the chance to earn 'Firbeck pounds', which reward positive behaviour and good effort. Leaders have identified the need to further improve pupils' behaviour by ensuring that raised expectations are transferred to behaviour beyond the classroom. Work is underway to support pupils, for example through mentoring and additional sporting activities to engage pupils at lunchtime.

Leaders have developed positive relationships with parents, particularly in regard to attendance. Parents I spoke with recognise and support leaders' expectations of regular attendance. Leaders have used support staff effectively, for example to liaise with parents and follow-up when pupils are absent. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance is slowly improving, although it remains below the national average.

Leaders have effected tangible improvements and understand the need to ensure greater consistency to bring about further improvements throughout the school.

### **External support**

The previous trust had begun to provide effective support, particularly through the work of the executive headteacher. Greater capacity for continued improvement has now been provided through the amalgamation with the Nova Education Trust. Members of the governing body and the trust have a secure knowledge and understanding of the school's strengths and areas in need of further improvement, and support you in effecting improvements. There are very positive relationships between the governing body and the trust, which means that all work together to promote improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Deborah Mosley

**Her Majesty's Inspector**