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14 December 2015

Mr Jason Wing
Executive Principal
Neale Wade Academy
Wimblington Road
March
Cambridgeshire
PE15 9PX

Dear Mr Wing

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Neale Wade Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 18 November 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the achievement of disadvantaged pupils at the academy.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you and a number of other senior, progress and subject leaders, two governors and a representative of the Active Learning Trust. I also met with groups of pupils from Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. I scrutinised the extensive range of documentation you provided relating to the achievement, attendance and destinations of all pupils and specifically of disadvantaged pupils. I looked at leaders' analysis of the use of the pupil premium grant funding and other policy, planning and review documents. I looked at pupils' work in a range of subjects and observed an additional mathematics teaching session taking place before the start of the academy day.

Context

The academy was last inspected in February 2015, when leadership and management and sixth-form provision were judged to be good. All other aspects of the academy's work were judged to require improvement. A new vice-principal appointed to lead and to raise standards in Key Stage 3 took up his position at the

start of the academic year. The academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school. It opened as a new academy in April 2013, sponsored by the Active Learning Trust. The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is broadly similar to the national average. It is over a quarter of the school's roll.

The impact of leadership and management on raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils

The executive principal, very ably supported by the vice-principals, leads the academy with the passionate conviction that all pupils at Neale Wade can and will realise their full academic and personal potential. Leaders and staff at all levels are challenged to fulfil their roles in achieving this. Rigorous targets are set for their performance which make clear what the expectations are; this includes the difference they are expected to make to the outcomes achieved by disadvantaged pupils. Pupils are making better progress and reaching higher standards than previously because leaders expect them to do well. Teaching is increasingly effective and extra support for pupils who are underachieving is well targeted.

Leaders are relentless in improving teaching through developing ways of working that support pupils to make increasingly good progress in their learning. For example, the detailed and innovative 'mastery curriculum,' implemented for all subjects, starts for pupils as they enter Year 7 and helps them to build the necessary skills and understanding they need to achieve well by the time they take their GCSEs. Regular assessments are used to determine whether pupils are ready to move on in their learning or if they require extra, specific support to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge they need. This very precise analysis, coupled with 'speaking tests' which involve pupils in recalling and explaining what they have learnt, are instrumental in accelerating the progress made by all pupils. They are particularly beneficial in ensuring disadvantaged pupils develop the language and skills they need to learn better.

The previous inspection report identified that disadvantaged pupils were not catching up fast enough with other pupils nationally or in the academy. It also stated that the focus placed on the learning needs of disadvantaged pupils was not fully effective in helping them to catch up with other pupils. Year 11 results in 2015 show that the proportion of disadvantaged pupils making expected progress in English improved to be similar to that of other pupils. Gaps in mathematics progress and in the attainment of five A*–C grades at GCSE in English and in mathematics remained broadly similar to those of 2014. Although most pupils made better progress, they did not have sufficient time to make up the ground lost through historically poorer teaching. Current detailed information relating to predictions for 2016 suggests that standards overall will continue to improve. Although gaps between disadvantaged pupils and others in the academy will not close completely, they are on track to narrow significantly. Pupils reported that the approaches teachers now use give lessons a more helpful structure and that they understand more. They say they benefit from the sharper feedback they receive about their work and appreciate that leaders and teachers have higher expectations of them.

Progress leaders track how well pupils in each year group are attending the academy, behaving and progressing in their learning. They know how well the pupils they are responsible for are achieving in different subjects and are starting to use this information to make certain that pupils receive the support and challenge they need to prevent them from falling behind in their learning. Heads of department are also monitoring pupils' progress carefully and are held to account for the progress made by all groups of pupils. However, for a small group of disadvantaged pupils in each year, the additional support they are given is not making enough difference to their engagement or their progress.

The successful additional focus and support given to improving English are now becoming evident in mathematics. The assistant principal responsible for mathematics has transformed the approaches to how it is taught. Pupils say they understand much better what they need to do and are more confident in their learning. Ninety Year 11 pupils are attending extra catch-up sessions three mornings a week and extra tuition is also given on Saturdays. Already nearly half of all pupils, including the disadvantaged pupils, attending these sessions have progressed by at least a GCSE grade. Pupils seen in one of these extra sessions at 8am had already enjoyed a bacon roll and were highly engaged in their learning.

As in many other aspects of their work and life at Neale Wade, pupils are encouraged to have high aspirations for their future. Effective guidance helps pupils well to understand potential future careers and the qualities they will need in order to be successful. Academy staff put careful thought into how they support disadvantaged pupils to access the courses they need and to receive wider mentoring and personal support. Pupils spoken to during the inspection provided moving accounts of how staff had given extra time and attention to ensuring they have been given every opportunity to succeed in their education and have access to more promising futures than they had previously hoped for.

Leaders know that the absence rates of disadvantaged pupils are higher than those of other pupils. To speed up the action taken to address poor attendance, they have employed their own full-time attendance officer to both support and challenge families to ensure that their children attend school regularly. She is also working with local primary schools to establish a shared approach to managing poor attendance. Pupils spoken to said that the weekly discussion of attendance in their tutor groups keeps its profile high. They found the information shared with them in assembly about the potential impact of poor attendance on their achievement shocking and say that staff are helping them to realise how important maximising their time at school is.

Governors understand the overall impact of the use of the pupil premium to enhance the learning and personal development of disadvantaged pupils. They do not, however, have a detailed understanding of which aspects of its use are the most effective and how well this is making a difference to each year group in the school. To address this, they have recently implemented a 'standards group' to focus on how well all groups of pupils, including the disadvantaged, are achieving. They have also allocated a link governor specifically to track the progress of disadvantaged

pupils and to establish a more detailed understanding of how the pupil premium is spent.

External support

Leaders are highly creative in improving the academy. They seek advice and support from other successful schools but always shape it to meet the needs of the pupils at Neale Wade. Representatives of the Active Learning Trust review pupils' progress every six weeks and visit the academy to focus on the achievement of different groups of pupils. Through the Trust, the academy engages in different projects, such as The Bridge project in Norfolk, which is developing boys' literacy learning.

The strengths in the academy's approaches to supporting its disadvantaged pupils effectively to achieve their potential are:

- The Principal leads the academy with an unwavering determination to ensure that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve well and are motivated, confident learners. The vice-principals are innovative and conscientious in implementing approaches to teaching that will make this happen.
- Improving the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is a key priority in the academy's planning and evaluation. Performance targets for leaders and for teachers include the expected contribution they will make to improving the achievement of all pupils but the specific focus given to those who are disadvantaged keeps their profile high and ensures staff are held to account for helping them to do well.
- Leaders at all levels know which pupils are disadvantaged, in particular those who are at risk of underachieving. They track their progress, attendance and behaviour carefully. Strategies such as the new approaches to helping pupils understand more complex mathematical learning, and the extra tuition provided, are making a significant difference to the amount of progress pupils are now making.
- Approaches to teaching are carefully thought through so that new learning is accessible to all pupils. They are taught both the skills and the language they need to learn effectively. As a result of the academy's approach to the 'mastery curriculum', pupils become increasingly confident and manage their learning in increasingly strong partnership with their teachers.
- Aspirations for all pupils are high. Leaders and teachers ensure pupils understand what options they have for their future education and careers. Where pupils need extra support, teachers 'go the extra mile' to help them achieve their goals. Leaders provide a significant amount of well-targeted support for pupils who are looked after by the local authority and for those who face significant challenges in their personal lives.

- Leaders have a range of strategies in place to support pupils' transition from primary school. Extra focus is being given to analysing any gaps in their learning and more attention than previously is being given to ensuring that they catch up quickly in Key Stage 3.

The weaknesses in the academy's approaches to supporting its disadvantaged pupils effectively to achieve their potential are:

- Until more recent arrangements for monitoring and addressing the attendance of pupils who have higher than average rates of absence were implemented, the gap between the absence of disadvantaged pupils and their peers was too wide. Although their overall attendance is improving, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who have higher rates of absence is still too large.
- Governors do not have a detailed enough understanding of the progress made by disadvantaged pupils in all year groups and subjects. Because targets for the use of the extra funding the academy receives for disadvantaged pupils are not always detailed enough, governors and leaders do not know which actions specifically provide the best value for money.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure governors develop a more detailed understanding of the progress made by disadvantaged pupils in all subjects and year groups. Ensure that they fully understand the impact of the different aspects of support provided using the pupil premium.
- Ensure that progress leaders use the wide range of information they have about individual pupils in each year group to ensure that the small groups of disadvantaged pupils who are not making expected progress are helped to catch up.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire, to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Chief Executive of the Active Learning Trust. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Prue Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector