

Primary academy is working to free pupils from poverty trap

Southwark Primary school in Nottingham serves one of the most disadvantaged areas of the city and has been rated outstanding by Ofsted.

Headteacher Michaela Saunders led the school through conversion and explains how being an academy is making a difference to the pupils:

Our academy has a very high pupil turnover, which reflects the transient nature of the local population. Crime, debt, addiction, child abuse and domestic violence are some of the difficulties many of our children face at home, and 41% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Despite all this, in 2013, 73% of our pupils achieved level 4 or above in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 2 – an increase of 11% from 62% in 2012.

Making our own decisions

We want to give our pupils the best possible education, with the skills and confidence to escape poverty and achieve what they want in life. Becoming an academy is helping us do this, because it's given us the freedom to make changes based on what we know works best for the school and the children.

One of our changes includes trialling the 2014 curriculum, and we've spent 6 months designing an interactive approach to learning that is broad, detailed and academically challenging.

We've also changed the length of the school day. We now offer childcare from 7.30am until 6.00pm, which helps us to support families who work.

And we're providing support for vulnerable children through a system of interventions, guided by a special educational needs disability coordinator (SENCO) and a senior assistant head.

Expanding our academy

By sourcing services more efficiently since becoming an academy, I've been able to run the school much more cost effectively. As a result we're now looking at building a specialist block for teaching science, art and music.

We're supporting 2 other schools through the conversion process and working through the process of becoming an approved academy sponsor. We hope to specialise in supporting struggling schools, because we know from experience the challenges they face and how the problems can be overcome.