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13 September 2012

Mr Neil Clark
Principal
The Dearne Advanced Learning Centre
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Dear Mr Clark

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of The Dearne Advanced Learning Centre

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 12 September 2012 and for the information which you provided before and during the inspection. It was most helpful that you were able to arrange a lesson observation and meeting timetable for me. Please pass on my thanks to all those involved in the inspection.

Since the previous inspection two Vice-Principals have been appointed and took up their posts on 11 June 2012. In addition, some staff left the school at the end of the summer term. In partnership with the local authority, a teacher has been seconded to work with the teaching and learning group and with the science department. The Governors Strategy Group meets monthly to monitor, in particular, the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The school is currently working closely with its chosen sponsor, Navigate Academies Trust, prior to becoming an academy in 2013.

As a result of the inspection on 7 February 2012, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

The appointment, since the previous inspection, of two Vice-Principals has been a timely and welcome addition to the senior team. They have quickly established clear routines and understand their roles well. Lines of accountability are clear and they are providing regular and helpful information, as a result of their monitoring, to members of the governing body. This enables the Principal to adopt a more-strategic overview of the progress students are making. All senior leaders contribute to the school improvement plan. Together with the monitoring and evaluation document, it is designed to provide a thorough understanding of the strengths of the school, the progress made by groups of students, as well as the

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challenges and barriers still to be overcome. It is, however, too early to judge the impact of these documents. The 'Pupil Premium' money has been used successfully to fund additional support for both English and mathematics subjects as well as improved staff-to-student ratios for students in Year 11 across all subjects. Intervention personalised support has also been provided for students before the start of the school day. The impact of this work is evident in the improved results for many students.

School data presented during the monitoring inspection showed that in 2012, those students known to be eligible for free school meals, lower ability students and those with a statement of special educational need or students supported by school action plus were more successful than previously in gaining eight GCSE or equivalent qualifications. As in 2011, all students left with at least one qualification. Un-validated data indicate that the proportion of students attaining A* to C grades in GCSE mathematics improved compared to the previous year and more students than previously made the progress expected of them. However, both measures are below that seen nationally. There was a noticeable improvement in the proportion of students attaining five A* to C GCSE grades. On the other hand, there was a marked decline in the proportion of students attaining A* to C GCSE grades and making the expected progress in English. Overall, the school was below the floor standards set by the government. The school is currently undertaking, in partnership with the local authority, a review of literacy provision in different departments. Varied practice has been identified and this was evident during the monitoring inspection. Several subjects, other than English, are giving due thought to developing students' extended writing and spoken contributions, others give it limited regard. More work is planned for later this month.

Regular tailored training aimed at improving the overall quality of teaching and learning has been implemented, since the previous inspection particularly, in order to improve practice. Following conversations with senior leaders and the joint observations undertaken during the monitoring inspection, the impact of this work was evident in some lessons observed. However, variable quality is still apparent. Stronger features seen in lessons included planning successfully so that all students made progress; were challenged correctly and teachers' expectations were appropriate. Students supported each other well and provided one another with helpful and apposite comments and suggestions so that their work could be improved. Students' first response to teachers' questions were skilfully developed so that students thought more widely and expanded their answers. Nevertheless, weaker features, which were noted during the previous inspection, still predominate in some lessons. These include a lack of clear and appropriate planning for all groups of students; insufficient consideration as to whether peer-marking is always appropriate and related to the subject being studied. Additionally, in a few lessons observed, too much emphasis is placed, by the teacher, on completing a task as a measure of the progress students make in a lesson.

The statement of action, provided by the local authority was evaluated by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and found to be 'not fit for purpose'. During the monitoring inspection a new plan was provided and this shows how the previous omission regarding consultation with parents and carers has been rectified. The plan now meets requirements. Local authority consultants are working closely with school leaders and within the English and

mathematics departments in particular. A senior member of the local authority is part of the strategy group, providing support and guidance as members of the governing body become more confident and able to interrogate and question the documentation provided for them. Consequently, challenge is more robust and appropriate. School leaders and staff welcome the work of the local authority and that provided by external consultants.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Marianne Young
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2012:

- Improve achievement and exceed the current floor standard in 2012 by:
 - increasing achievement in mathematics and closing the gap with English
 - improving the progress made by lower-ability students, students known to be eligible for free school meals, and students supported by school action plus or with statements of special educational needs toward gaining eight GCSE or equivalent qualifications
 - improving students' skills in literacy, extended writing and their spoken contributions to learning.

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by:
 - improving the match of teaching to the range of student needs in the class
 - refining the use of questioning to challenge thinking and stimulate students' personal response
 - increasing opportunities for students to work independently
 - extending the use of peer and self-assessment as means for students to reflect on and improve their learning
 - improving the consistency of marking to highlight what students have achieved and how they can improve.

- Further strengthen the senior leadership team.