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10 October 2013

Ms Breffni Martin  
Headteacher  
Fir Vale School  
Owler Lane  
Sheffield  
South Yorkshire  
S4 8GB

Dear Ms Martin

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fir Vale School, Sheffield**

Following my visit to your academy on 9 October 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 July 2013. 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:

- evaluate the new lesson planning structure to determine if it is leading to more challenge for all groups of students
- continue to reduce the proportion of teaching that requires improvement
- refine the post Ofsted action plan, putting in concrete milestones and opportunities to evaluate what is working.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, the leadership team, middle leaders, students and two members of the governing body. A variety of classrooms were also visited. The academy improvement plans were evaluated along with other academy documentation including records from lesson observations. A brief analysis was carried out on the 2013 GCSE results and tracking data for current Year 11 was looked at.

## **Context**

Since the inspection in July 2013 there have been no contextual changes.

## **Main findings**

After the inspection, the academy has shown real determination to become a good school as soon as possible. They are well on their way to achieving this goal; and in a very short time the headteacher has drawn up an action plan which addresses the most important areas requiring improvement.

Staff have agreed a new policy for teaching and learning and a new lesson planning structure is being used. This makes it more explicit that students need to be challenged, and also opportunities to develop literacy should be taken in every lesson. Student progress is a term that is heard around the academy. The students talk about making more progress; as do teaching staff and governors. There is a real sense that all students should do the best that they can, no matter what their starting point is. The students are clear that the teachers are "keeping things tighter", and are insisting on high quality work. They also report that the senior leaders are checking their work more often to make sure that they are making progress.

Although improvement plans are in place, they need to be amended to include milestones, and also points when evaluation should happen. The academy is doing a great deal of things to improve, but needs to evaluate what is working best. There are arrangements for checking on the quality of learning including regular scrutiny of students' work and the observation of lessons. This has led to all teachers having plans for developing their teaching skills, and the feedback to teachers identifies clearly what they are expected to do in order to improve their performance. The evaluation of teaching is not just carried out through one off observations. The academy also uses the progress students make and the quality of work to assess the classroom practice. This means that there is a real understanding that good teaching needs to be the norm day after day, not just when an observation takes place.

The existing good practice in mathematics has been shared with other subject areas. This focus on what works in classes will be continued and extended. External advice also needs to be continued in the drive to make all teaching good or better. Early indications in science are that the new ideas brought in are improving the quality of teaching.

Members of the governing body bring great experience and expertise to their roles. They want to do even more and be integral to the evaluations taking place. They are going to do this through learning walks and interviews with staff and students. The governors are close to the community and understand that they need to work with the academy so that the students have skills they need to succeed.

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

## **External support**

The academy has brought in a number of consultants to develop subject areas; and a academy improvement adviser has been commissioned to work with the leadership team. The partnerships are being used to provide individual teachers with extra guidance and training; the impact of this needs to be evaluated.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the DfE Academies Advisers Unit.

Yours sincerely

Robert Pritchard

**Her Majesty's Inspector**