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18 October 2013

Miss Colette Jones
Headteacher
South Leeds Academy
Old Run Road
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Dear Miss Jones

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of South Leeds Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 17 October 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses in June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the Principal and associate principal, five other members of the senior leadership team, the Chair of the Board of Trustees and two representatives of the sponsor. The sponsor and Board of Trustees' statement of action and the academy's action plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection there have been significant changes in the staffing of the school. A total of 29 members of staff, teachers and teaching assistants, have left the academy. Two members of the senior leadership team have left the academy. There have been changes in the roles of some staff in response to the needs identified by senior leaders.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The senior leaders of the academy have responded positively to the inspection report and have set in train a number of strategies to bring about improvement. The main focus for improvement is the quality of teaching and how leadership and management can improve teaching and the progress made by students.

Since the inspection senior leaders have introduced an improved framework for learning and teaching in which all staff have received training. The framework includes reference to the teaching standards and is used by staff for self-appraisal and for the monitoring carried out by the extended leadership team. The model is designed to promote staff development rather than being used solely for inspection purposes. There is thus a clear link to professional development some of which is for all teachers such as the framework for teaching and learning. However, much professional development is bespoke and organised on the basis of the analysis of staff needs. Since the inspection other innovations have been introduced including more rigorous faculty reviews which were all completed in September using the same evaluation tools. The performance management process now in place is more rigorous than that deployed before the inspection.

Just before the inspection the senior leaders reorganised the staff to focus on a new leadership structure to address previous weaknesses. The new structure involved the appointment of directors of learning and leaders of learning. After the inspection, training for these new roles continued and the new structure is being fully implemented this term. An overview of the progress made in improving management is being generated on a monthly basis. The extended senior leadership now meets weekly and provides links with faculty management to monitor progress and bring about coherence. For example, all faculties now have action plans that use the same model for management.

The attendance of students is being improved by staff who are newly appointed to the role. There is a clear focus on developing parental and community relationships. This is planned to have a positive impact on attitudes to the importance of attending school. Staff speaking languages other than English are being used to build these relationships. The work of changing attitudes is beginning with primary schools prior to the transition of students from Year 6 to Year 7. Particular effort is put into raising the attendance of students with the worst attendance record, with ex-army staff working with these young people as a motivational experience.

The arrangements for the Board of Trustees of the academy are under review. The trustees recognise the main thrust of improvements needed as those identified in the inspection report. They have developed link governors to work with staff in specific areas of the curriculum and are seeking to provide more challenge. The action plan produced by the trustees lacks some details that are needed for it to be effective. The sponsors are providing significant challenge and support to the leaders of the academy.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The academy's action plan is fit for purpose.

The sponsor and Board of Trustees' statement of action is not fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, DfE Academies Advisers Unit, the Chair of the Board of Trustees and sponsors of the Academy. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Richardson

Additional Inspector