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23 January 2014

Mr Andy Cope
Headteacher
Armthorpe Academy
Mere Lane
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN3 2DA

Dear Mr Cope

Special measures monitoring inspection of Armthorpe Academy

Following my visit with Phil Smith Her Majesty's Inspector to your school on 21 and 22 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy is not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures

Having considered all the evidence I recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint any additional NQTs.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Interim Director Children and Young People's Service for Doncaster.

Yours sincerely

Jan Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching throughout the academy and in all subjects, so that it is at least consistently good, accelerates progress and raises standards, by making sure that:
 - students know exactly what they are expected to learn in each lesson
 - tasks are closely matched to the levels students need to work at and ensure students of all abilities are well challenged
 - students respond in future work to advice given in marking that tells them what they have achieved and what their next steps in learning should be
 - staff have the highest expectations of the quality, quantity and presentation of students' work.

- Raise standards, especially in English and mathematics across Key Stages 3 and 4, so that students make at least good progress, by ensuring that:
 - consistently good or better teaching is established and sustained across the academy, starting with an audit of the strengths and areas for development in teaching
 - best practice in the teaching of English and mathematics is modelled for other staff.

- Secure students' good behaviour and attitudes towards learning through making sure that staff demonstrate the highest expectations of students' conduct.

- Improve students' attendance more rapidly through:
 - an overhaul of the attendance procedures
 - a greater emphasis on ensuring students and their parents understand the relationship between progress and attendance.

- Strengthen significantly the impact of leaders and managers at all levels on raising standards and accelerating students' progress by ensuring that:
 - all leaders have very clearly defined roles, responsibilities and accountability for raising standards, improving the quality of teaching and increasing the effectiveness of the curriculum in their areas, and report regularly to the senior leadership team the progress made
 - the headteacher and deputy headteacher check and assess very carefully the impact of the work of subject and year leaders on the academy's goals for improvement in order to keep the academy on track to improve the quality of education.

- Improve the quality of governance by making sure that the governing body:
 - develops systems and procedures that enable governors to check for themselves how well the academy is doing, so that they can support and challenge it more robustly.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 21 and 22 January 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents, had a telephone conversation with a representative of the Yorkshire Education Trust and met with the headteacher, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, senior and middle leaders and a group of teachers. Inspectors also observed 11 lessons and paid short visits to a further eight.

Context

Five teachers left the academy at the end of the autumn term and four are currently on maternity leave. Almost one fifth of the teaching staff have joined the academy since the last monitoring inspection.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Indications are that achievement is improving.

The academy's data indicate that there will be a considerable rise in the proportion of Year 11 students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. The forecasts are based on early entry examination results, controlled assessments, mock examinations and teachers' assessments. English and mathematics teachers have worked with subject specialists from the Yorkshire Education Trust to make sure that the assessments are realistic. A GCSE examiner has also looked at the English assessments.

Data also show that current Year 11 students are making much better progress than those last year in both English and mathematics. Progress is around average and the gaps between different groups of students, especially those supported by pupil premium funding, are closing.

Tracking data for students lower down the academy show that they are making better progress than in previous years.

The quality of teaching

The school has an accurate view of the quality of teaching and has many initiatives in place to support teachers and help them to improve. Bespoke support packages are in place for teachers whose practice requires improvement. The majority of established teachers deliver good quality teaching and are working hard to improve further.

Permanent teachers have detailed data on the progress of their students, especially different groups of students within each class. They use the information to plan lessons and extra support to narrow gaps in attainment.

The quality of teaching and learning overall, however, is being affected by the high staff absence and changes in teachers. The quality of supply teachers is variable and students find frequent changes in staffing unsettling. It is taking time for new teachers to build the good working relationships that underpin effective learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour in lessons is not as good as at the last monitoring inspection. The new behaviour system that was introduced at the start of the academic year is no longer being applied consistently well and the number of detentions and exclusions is rising. The academy is aware that behaviour has deteriorated, especially since Christmas, and is taking action but the recently introduced initiatives have not had time to have an impact. Low level disruption and testing the teacher's authority are hampering learning where teaching is weakest and, in some cases, where the teacher is new to the group or on supply. The academy is making effective use of local provision for students who have more serious behavioural problems and are unable to cope with full-time mainstream education.

Attendance continues to improve. Average attendance is higher than at the same time last year and the proportion of persistent absentees is reducing. In November, senior leaders visited the homes of the worst attenders in Year 10 and there has been a marked reduction in the number of absences as a result.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders and governors are monitoring all aspects of provision very closely and are working relentlessly to bring about improvements. They are drawing on expertise from the Yorkshire Education Trust and beyond in order to find successful strategies and solutions. Initiatives are successfully improving achievement and attendance.

Leaders and governors are taking tough action to improve the quality of teaching. They are prepared to make difficult decisions and are making a determined effort to tackle the high level of staff absence. This is resulting in 'short term pain' in order to secure 'long-term gain'.

Governors have undergone a thorough review and skills audit to improve their effectiveness. They are receiving on going training that is already helping them to work more efficiently and offer increasing challenge and support.

External support

The academy continues to receive very good support from the other academies in the Yorkshire Education Trust but despite this it is taking time to bring about improvements.