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12 March 2014

Mrs Jeanette Saw
Headteacher
Audenshaw School Academy Trust
Hazel Street
Audenshaw
Manchester
Lancashire
M34 5NB

Dear Mrs Saw

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Audenshaw School Academy Trust, Tameside

Following my visit to your school on 11 March 2014, 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 school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 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 school should take further action to:

- share the action plan with all staff to ensure you take the whole school community with you on the journey of improvement
- ensure that all students have aspirational targets and all staff have high expectations of what they can achieve
- ensure that all staff are consistently following the marking and feedback procedures.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, the Chair and three other members of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority and two groups of students. I evaluated the school action plan and scrutinised other key documentation. I also had the opportunity to accompany you on a tour of the school and look at some students' work.

Context

The curriculum leader of mathematics left at Christmas. A new appointment has been made and he will take up his position after Easter. In the interim period, the mathematics department is being led by a member of the senior leadership team.

Main findings

Although disappointed by the last inspection judgement, you recognise it as a true reflection of where the school was at the end of last year. Along with the governors and senior leaders you have used the report's findings to challenge all staff to 'raise their game' to ensure that all students make the best possible progress. The higher expectations that you have set them have led to a change of culture within the school, but you acknowledge that there remains a significant minority of staff who are resistant to this.

The action plan, which has been written in response to the inspection, focuses closely on the areas for improvement which were highlighted, but you have chosen not to share the actual full plan with all the staff. This plan provides a clear route map for your journey of improvement and if all staff have access to this it enables them to see the part they need to play and their place in the bigger picture. You have instructed curriculum leaders to write an action plan focusing solely on improving the quality of teaching in their departments. These are of variable quality but there is clearly a sharper focus now on accountability for all middle leaders. Each curriculum leader meets fortnightly with the senior leader link and all department meeting agendas are focused on students' progress.

You took swift and decisive action to tackle the leadership issues in mathematics and show this same resolution to eradicate inadequate teaching and leadership throughout the school. Since Christmas, senior and middle leaders have been monitoring much more closely and systematically. For example, all staff now use a standard template for lesson planning which focuses on using assessment data to inform learning, and these are checked every two weeks. Teachers are now planning more effectively to meet students' individual needs, but it is too early to quantify what impact this is having on their progress.

The assistant headteacher who is leading on teaching and learning is passionate about improving what happens in classrooms throughout the school and this enthusiasm is having a positive effect on many teachers. Senior leaders meet every week with a different group of students to talk to them about their learning and look at their work. It is clear from the minutes of these meetings, and my own experience of talking to students that they are able to reflect on their learning and articulate their views effectively.

One area that the students feel very positively about is the new marking and feedback policy. They welcome the opportunity to respond to their teachers' comments and enter a dialogue about their learning and progress. As one boy said, 'before, they didn't explain how you could improve.' However, although some teachers are doing this very effectively, a work scrutiny revealed that this was not happening consistently, both within and across departments. The weakest practice was seen in the books of Key Stage 3 students.

The systems used to track students' progress which were introduced in September are producing more secure achievement data. Senior leaders have ensured that the data which teachers input are robust as they carry out an audit with each member of staff to triangulate levels and grades with a random selection of students' work. The most recent data indicate

that students' progress in mathematics is improving and the progress gap between those students supported by the pupil premium and their peers is narrowing in this subject. However, the data also show that, overall, not enough students are exceeding expected progress. Too many students have been set targets which are based only on them making expected progress. Senior leaders took the decision to set aspirational targets for the more able only which has led to variation in expectations of students' performance.

Governors have been swift to respond to the points pertaining to them in the inspection report. An external review of governance has taken place and a thorough report has been produced. Planning is taking place to restructure the governing body by the end of the academic year. They realise that their work must focus more keenly on the progress of students and that they must not rely on simply being told information from senior leaders. There is now a link pupil premium governor who is working with staff in school to track the impact of how this funding is being spent. The Chair of Governors works very closely with you, particularly on staffing decisions.

External support

Since the inspection, the local authority officer linked to the school has helped you with your action plan and self-evaluation document. He has made himself available to you both in school and to offer advice on the phone. You have appreciated this and will take up the offer of further support if required.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and as below.

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Local authority - including where the school is an academy