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5 May 2014

Joanna Manson
Headteacher
The High Arcal School
High Arcal Drive
Sedgley
Dudley
DY3 1BP

Dear Mrs Manson

Special measures monitoring inspection of The High Arcal School

Following my visit to your academy on 2 May 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 academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 11 December 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, your senior leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body and the chairs of two governing body committees, the heads of faculty for English and mathematics, a group of teachers and, at their request, three Year 11 students. The single central record was checked and the academy's statement of action and improvement/action plans were evaluated.

Context

Since the last inspection you have restructured the leadership team to clarify roles and responsibilities and three teachers have been appointed. Two permanent deputy headteacher posts have been advertised and it is expected that appointments will be made before the next monitoring inspection.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The governing body has written a statement of action, and you and your leaders have produced a school improvement plan. However, currently these documents are not fit for purpose. This is because areas for improvement from the last inspection are not specifically addressed. As a result the actions identified do not link clearly to these through clear, measurable milestones and success criteria, over the full two-year period for improvement. Consequently, it will be very difficult for governors to effectively monitor and review progress and improvement. We agreed that these issues would be addressed as a matter of urgency so that the documents can be re-evaluated during the next monitoring inspection.

Nonetheless, you and your leaders have taken urgent action in response to the last inspection, which is beginning to have a positive impact. For instance, you have reviewed and improved the academy's systems for tracking students' progress. Leaders at all levels are now able to rapidly identify underperformance and all teachers are very clear that this must be tackled equally rapidly with appropriate help and support, followed by monitoring of their impact. Subject leaders report that the quality of information provided has improved, so their role now involves 'analysis followed by action, rather than collection followed by number crunching.' Consequently, the academy's own data are showing improved progress for students in English and mathematics in Key Stage 4.

You have also reviewed the performance of each faculty area and action plans have been produced, based on the findings. Subject leaders report that this has empowered them to take rapid action to secure required improvements. They and other teachers spoken to agree that they have a very clear understanding of the academy's overall vision for improvement, feel part of that process, and are confident that they are contributing to it. This is because faculty meetings now focus on students' progress and all staff are aware of when and how quality assurance is taking place. Teachers report that a positive impact of this is their increasing focus on accelerating students' progress in every lesson.

The new behaviour management system places high expectations on staff to ensure consistency of application, and on students to recognise and respond to very clear models of behaviour. You now have the ability to respond rapidly to identified patterns of behaviour and, while the system is in its infancy, both staff and students report their appreciation of this approach. Students spoken to during the monitoring visit said that they have already noticed an improvement in behaviour in the classroom.

Governors have now completed an audit of their skills and are currently analysing the results. A review of governance is due to take place this term. However, a number of actions have been taken already in response to the inspection report. For instance, governors have undertaken training on interpreting data in RAISEonline and the Data Dashboard. They report that they now feel confident that they can challenge appropriately, including requesting information in formats that they can use more effectively. A recent review of how the governing body communicates has led to a number of changes that have had a positive impact, particularly in terms of engagement with parents. The Chair of the Governing Body reports that governors are now known in the community and parents are happy to approach them with issues they may wish to raise.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The academy's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The academy's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Dudley and the Academy Advisers Unit. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mel Ford
Her Majesty's Inspector