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Mr Stephen Henry
Principal
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Lancashire
PR2 9YR

Dear Mr Henry

Special measures monitoring inspection of Fulwood Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 14 and 15 May 2014, with Peter McKay, Additional Inspector, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The academy is advised to consider appointing newly qualified teachers only in those subjects where its quality assurance processes indicate there is good teaching and leadership.

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 sponsor, the Chair of the Governing Body, The Education Funding Agency, the DfE Academies Advisers unit and the Interim Executive Director for Children & Young People.

Yours sincerely,

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching so that it is at least good or better in order to accelerate progress quickly for all groups of students, especially in mathematics and English by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have consistently high expectations of students and set demanding tasks
 - staff use information on students' progress to check more rigorously that students are doing well enough
 - teachers plan lessons carefully to get the most out of all students, including the most able and those that need additional support
 - the pace and challenge of learning in lessons increases
 - teachers provide more opportunities for students to find things out for themselves and improve their independent learning skills
 - those students who require additional help with their learning receive effective support
 - that teachers' marking gives students useful guidance on how to improve in the subject.

- Raise standards, in mathematics and English, by making sure that:
 - learning for students in mathematics is practical and meaningful, and involves them in working things out for themselves
 - teachers adopt a consistent approach to improving students' skills in speaking, writing, spelling and numeracy in subjects across the curriculum.

- Improve the effectiveness of senior and middle leaders, and bring greater urgency to the drive to improve achievement, by:
 - ensuring the accuracy of the academy's self-evaluation, particularly in judging students' progress and the impact of teaching on progress over time
 - improving the quality of teaching so that it is good enough to help students make up for prior underachievement
 - ensuring all teachers have high enough expectations of what students can achieve
 - ensuring that leaders track students' progress more closely in order to identify underachievement more quickly
 - ensuring middle leaders are held accountable for the progress students make, and the effectiveness of teaching, in their areas of responsibility
 - making sure leaders of subjects hold class teachers to account for the progress students make
 - taking firm action to deal with any inadequate teaching.

- Improve the effectiveness of the governing body by:
 - making sure that governors are fully informed about the effectiveness of teaching, and how well students are making progress, including in relation to national expectations

- holding senior leaders more rigorously to account for the progress of all students and the impact of teaching on students' progress over time
- checking more closely on the use of pupil premium funding and fully challenging leaders on how well it is used to raise achievement
- undertaking an external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the academy's use of pupil premium funding, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 14 and 15 May 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, other senior leaders, subject leaders, the literacy leader, librarian and groups of students. Telephone discussions were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and the sponsor. Visits were made to 16 lessons and to extra-curricular sessions, as well as to tutor sessions. A sample of students' work was scrutinised by inspectors along with two of the academy's leaders.

Context

A new Principal took up post at the beginning of the summer term following the retirement of the previous post-holder. A new member of the senior leadership team will join the academy in June 2014 and will initially take responsibility for the leadership of the mathematics department. The academy is in the process of appointing a substantive head of mathematics to commence in September 2014. The roles of senior leaders are under review. Two new members have joined the governing body. Student numbers have remained stable and a higher number of students has been recruited for September 2014 than at any time in the last three years.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

The academy's data indicate that attainment is set to rise in 2014, although the proportion of students attaining five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics is likely to remain well below the national figure. There is continuing unevenness across subjects, with consistently higher rates of progress being made in English than in mathematics from students' relative starting points. The gap between the achievement of students eligible for support through the pupil premium (additional government funding) and their peers in the academy is closing, but the progress and attainment of this group of students continues to be lower than that of students eligible for support through the pupil premium nationally in mathematics.

The picture of improvement in English shown in the academy's comprehensive data is borne out in observations of students' work in lessons and in their books. Most engage enthusiastically in all aspects of their work in English and show increased stamina in their writing. Students' progress is accelerating in reading as a result of a consistently strong cross-academy focus. Daily reading sessions for all students mean that most are encountering a range of texts and developing better comprehension skills. Additional support for students with lower attainment in reading, or those who are at an early stage in learning English, is having a positive impact. Standards of presentation in students' work remain variable across subjects and errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar are not always identified or corrected; consequently, they persist. Students' numeracy skills are not well

developed across the curriculum and achievement in mathematics is stalling for some students because of an insecure grasp of basic concepts.

The quality of teaching

A key factor underpinning the improvement in the quality of teaching is the better information staff now receive from senior leaders regarding students' attainment, needs and targets. Robust student performance data are enabling teachers to tailor their teaching more precisely to meet students' needs and to identify their next steps in learning. Leaders have developed new policies for teaching and learning, and for feedback, with input from subject leaders, along with a feedback policy. These documents emphasise high expectations and clarify processes to be followed in the academy. The policies will be formally adopted later in the term, but there is already evidence of substantial good practice being developed, with students being increasingly challenged to achieve their best.

Creative teaching, secured through excellent subject knowledge and careful consideration of how students learn best, features particularly in English and religious education. Year 8 students were highly engaged by an imaginatively planned lesson to develop their understanding of creation theory. The teacher made learning exciting by involving students in a 'Dragon's Den' activity and challenged groups of students appropriately to move onwards in securing difficult theoretical concepts. In science, students' understanding of photosynthesis was consolidated through the teacher's memorable use of models and images. Students have excellent access to computers and this was maximised in a briskly paced English lesson where Year 10 students completed the focused redrafting of extended writing with maturity and insight.

Students are responding positively to the academy's recent work to develop teaching and learning. They value the new 'green pen marking' that encourages them to improve on specific details of their work. They also enjoy the new 'takeaway homework' that enables them to organise their own study, choose specific extended assignments and produce work independently in interesting ways. A Year 8 student's video clip demonstrating her understanding of poetic techniques is a powerful indication of the creative potential of students that is now being unleashed.

Although an increasing proportion of teaching is good or better, some poor practice persists. This is characterised by time being wasted on mundane tasks that do not enhance students' understanding and occasions when subject-specific content and understanding is sacrificed for low-level activities. Some teachers are unclear as to how to develop students' literacy skills. Good quality materials are provided by the literacy coordinator to be used in weekly literacy sessions during tutor time. These are sometimes used effectively to consolidate and check on students' understanding, but on other occasions the materials are not adapted sufficiently well by teachers to meet students' needs and therefore valuable opportunities to deepen and apply their learning are lost. There is variability in the expectations that different teachers have with regard to standards of presentation of students' work. The quality of teachers'

marking ranges from clear and insightful diagnosis of 'what went well' and advice to students as to how their work would be 'even better if ...' to perfunctory or non-existent responses that demotivate students.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students told inspectors that the friendly, calm behaviour that they observed during this inspection was broadly typical of academy life. The academy's comprehensive data indicate that the rate of exclusion has been reduced, with no fixed-term exclusions in the current academy year. Leaders attribute this success to better teaching, an engaging curriculum and careful use of alternative provision for students whose needs are best met by spending some of their time following courses led by other providers. Use of the academy's internal exclusion room is carefully monitored, with very few students being sent there on a repeat basis. Attendance has improved and in the current academic year it is just above last year's national figure. Few students are persistently absent and the academy's attendance team works effectively with parents and outside agencies to minimise learning time being lost.

Students' attitudes to learning are largely positive; they are sometimes tentative about expressing their opinions verbally, but show interest in their work and complete most tasks assiduously. They engage positively in their homework and most complete corrections when these are pointed out to them. They enjoy undertaking research using the computers the academy provides for them. Students value the care that their teachers show them and are delighted by the programme of extra-curricular activities that they believe help their learning.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The newly appointed Principal has lost no time in articulating his vision for the academy's development and has secured the support of leaders, staff and students. He established contact with the senior team and heads of department prior to taking up post and was able to work with them and the outgoing Principal to effect a smooth transition in leadership. Staff and students commented positively to inspectors on his approachability, listening skills and high expectations. They feel enthused by the renewed direction he has brought to the academy and motivated by the simple mantra: 'Work hard. Be nice.'

In a very short time the Principal has built relationships with colleagues, parents and the wider community. The roles of senior leaders are being reviewed to ensure that individuals' talents are used most effectively and that there is no duplication of effort. The senior team have drawn up action plans to reinvigorate work on the key priorities they now lead.

The external review of governance recommended at the section 5 inspection has begun. Two new governors have been appointed, who bring expertise and rigour to their roles. Governors' work to monitor and evaluate the use of pupil premium

funding has been strengthened and the high quality performance data governors now receive enable them to challenge leaders incisively. The academy's procedures for ensuring students' safety are exemplary.

Work to improve the quality of teaching slowed during the spring term, but is now being addressed with increased rigour. Robust quality assurance procedures have been developed by the new Principal and senior team. These are at an early stage of implementation but are providing staff with the clarity and direction they need. Regular discussions between senior and middle leaders are having an impact on raising expectations and standards, but this is not yet consistently the case. Some subject leaders are excellent role models who have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in performance and the capacity to enthuse their colleagues. This is the case in technology where the head of department has eagerly embarked on developing strategies to raise achievement, based on analysis of performance data, but in a few other subjects there is less evidence of impact. Departmental self-evaluation is now completed systematically and reviewed rigorously by senior leaders; they have found the accuracy of departmental self-evaluation to be variable. There is a strong correlation between the academy's self-evaluation and improvement priorities. Departmental leaders are in the process of redrawing plans to address needs in their subjects. Governors and leaders are now taking concerted action to secure improvement in leadership, teaching and achievement in mathematics.

The literacy leader is enthusiastic and knowledgeable. She is aware of the need to embed literacy skills in the curriculum and has worked hard, in collaboration with the steering group, to raise the profile of reading. She has had insufficient opportunity to monitor the teaching of literacy sessions in tutor time. There has been substantial investment of resources and time into a reading program that is well planned and delivered. Leaders are clear about how its impact will be evaluated, by raising pupils' reading competence quickly. The recently appointed librarian has made a good start on ensuring that the library is a well-used vibrant hub of the academy. The coordination of numeracy across the curriculum is underdeveloped.

The academy provides a broad, balanced curriculum. In addition to the formal curriculum, students undertake a wide range of extracurricular activities from gardening to drama during extended Wednesday afternoons. They thrive in these sessions and appreciate the time their teachers devote to them and their opportunities to work with students from different year groups.

External support

The academy has forged links with other schools through a national initiative designed to share good practice in leadership and learning. The Principal has brokered the support of two independent consultants to help develop and moderate quality assurance. A National Leader in Governance is undertaking the external review of the governing body. Several members of staff have links with local schools through various networks. The Principal is aware of the various sources of support

available to the academy and is using them judiciously. It is too early to ascertain the impact of this support in raising students' achievement.