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Mr M Rushby
Headteacher
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DN37 9EH

Dear Mr Rushby

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to John Whitgift Academy, Grimsby

Following my visit to your academy on 23 May 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, the academy's trust partners and the Education Advisory Board who are the governors, are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- Increase the effectiveness of strategies to accelerate students' progress so that the outcomes are not only improving but also represent good progress overall when set against students' starting points.

Evidence

During my visit, I met with you, several other school leaders, the trust partners' regional director and governors. I spoke to students, teachers and other staff. I reviewed progress, attendance and behaviour data, your action plans and monitoring records of teaching. I saw 16 lessons, scrutinised students' books and visited your internal exclusion provision.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection there has been a management restructure. Six staff resigned, including the heads of three subject departments and an assistant principal. Appointments have been made to cover these departures, including a director of teaching and learning with support from the trust partner. Two extra English teachers have been appointed but vacancies remain for one food technology one humanities teacher.

Main findings

The academy's leaders are under no illusions about the major task facing them if they are to realise their ambition of establishing a good school within five terms. The school has some distance to travel to demonstrate unequivocally that outcomes for students and the quality of provision are sufficiently effectively to warrant this judgement. There is no doubt that the school is on an improving trajectory in terms of students' attainments and achievements, the standard of teaching and attendance and behaviour. However, the starting points in a number of these cases was low and are not yet close to comparing favourably with age-related expectations and/or national benchmarks, which is the goal.

Inspection evidence and the school's latest progress data indicate that the strategies introduced to improve the effectiveness of teaching on learning are generally working. Students are making faster progress in several subjects. However, there are inconsistencies in outcomes within and between, year groups, different groups of students, and subjects such as additional science, history and PE, that are proving more resistant to improvement. The challenge for the academy is to accelerate progress even further so that students quickly make up the previously lost ground in their learning and make good rather than mediocre or slow progress overall, when set against their starting points.

It is clear from observing lessons, examining pupils' books and talking to staff and students that generally expectations of students are higher, notably around presentation of work, the quality of their responses to questions and the degree of difficulty in the work set. There is now greater consistency in the quality and regularity of marking and feedback and students are being given opportunities to respond to the written comments on their work. Students are also being inspired to work collaboratively and to take responsibility for their own learning by thinking things through for themselves rather than being over-reliant on the teacher. Students' mathematical skills are being boosted by chances to practice and apply their developing skills in subjects other than mathematics. These improvements have been underpinned by bespoke training to upskill staff, including programmes of support and challenge, creating engaging learning environments, workshops to disseminate good practice and rigorous and regular monitoring to evaluate and refine the impact of the improvement strategies introduced.

Student attendance has improved and levels of persistent absence have fallen, and while still not good enough, these changes are steps in the right direction. Fixed term and permanent exclusions have also fallen. However, the school needs to ensure students always receive appropriate work in a timely fashion when they are in the internal exclusion provision to ensure they do not fall behind which could hinder their successful re-integration back into class. Behaviour on corridors was inconsistent and boisterous when students were not directly supervised.

The academy's leaders have developed some sound improvement strategies in consultation with staff and other stakeholders, which are showing signs of bearing fruit. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the progress the academy is making in tackling its key priorities have been strengthened, and leaders have ensured staff understand their roles in helping the academy to improve further. Middle leaders are working more efficiently and are starting to make better use of the information they collect about the quality of teaching and students' work to challenge their teams to improve, identify any students at risk, or already falling behind and coordinate suitable interventions. However, the turbulence in staffing has the potential to destabilise the academy's continued improvement if it is not managed

suitably. Some strategic planning is incomplete and needs addressing with urgency.

Governors are clear about the academy's current effectiveness and how they are going to influence further improvements. They have an increased presence in the school, stronger engagement with parents and carers, and are showing more informed support and challenge of the actions being taken by the academy's leaders. Governors report a greater transparency in the sharing of academy performance information, a sharper focus and better awareness of the relative progress of different groups of students. This has been facilitated by the first-hand evidence they are gaining of the impact of the academy's strategies by visiting classrooms, sampling students' books and calling middle and senior leaders to account for students' progress, the quality of teaching, attendance and behaviour. Scrutiny of the minutes of their meetings endorses these claims.

The academy's improvement plans are incomplete and not helpful as tools to support longer term improvement. They require revision to ensure that they contain logically sequenced, clear, relevant and specific actions that address all of the key priorities. The academy needs to ensure that its plans have measurable outcomes and milestones, suitable lines of responsibility, and distinct accountability for monitoring and evaluation of the progress being made.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. In the meantime, the school should email a termly progress report to me.

External support

At this initial stage, the School Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA) and its representatives are providing effective support and challenge to the academy which is helping it to improve faster than it might otherwise do. The collective experience, expertise and financial resources at its disposal have facilitated extra capacity in leadership and management by, for example, budding senior leaders in the academy with leaders from another SPTA school where leadership was recently judged to be outstanding by Ofsted. The academy has also had access to SPTA training and development personnel, particularly around enhancing the impact of teaching on learning making more effective provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Education Advisory Board, the local authority and the DfE - Academies Advisers Unit.

Yours sincerely

John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector