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17 September 2014

Mr Martin Knowles
Interim Principal
The Oldham Academy North
Broadway
Royton
Oldham
OL2 5BF

Dear Mr Knowles

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Oldham Academy North, Oldham

Following my visit to the academy on 16 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. 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 May 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, the governing body and the sponsor 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 pupils' attainment in music, history, geography and languages
- develop students' British values of tolerance, democracy and rule of law by developing respect for peoples' difference and for all adults who work in the academy
- amend the action plan to plot a route to becoming good at the next inspection.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, senior leaders, teachers who lead subject faculties and with five members of the governing body. I also spoke with two representatives of the academy sponsor by telephone. I toured the school with you to observe students in their classes. I read through some documentation including

the school's action plan. I also considered the evidence provided in confidence by some members of staff who were previous employees of the academy.

Context

Since the most recent inspection, the Principal left to take up a new post at another Oldham academy. Eighteen new teachers started at the beginning of term in September, including some with leadership responsibilities in the academy such as the special educational needs coordinator (Senco), and leader for science, replacing teachers who left in July.

Main findings

Changes to the system of internal bells have led to an improvement in students' punctuality to lessons. All teachers now meet and greet their classes at the door and usher students quickly into the classrooms. As a result of these changes, students are in class and on time ready to learn. There have also been changes to improve students' behaviour. A new reward system and a centralised system to check behaviour has started to have an impact. The proportion of students excluded from school, or from lessons, has decreased by half compared with the same period a year ago.

Teachers have progress files which identify different groups of students in their classes, their levels of achievements and any additional needs they may have. As a result teachers have greater ownership of, and greater responsibility for, information about students' attainment and progress. Senior leaders have introduced a new system to assess and manage the quality of teaching. The system, instead of being based mainly on pre-arranged observations of lessons, is now based on a broader set of evidence including checking students' work; speaking with students; checking assessments as well as observations of lessons. As a result, early indications are, there is a more accurate judgement of teaching over time in each class.

Senior leaders have introduced a high-quality system to identify the needs of students and to make sure all teachers use a similar strategy to enable students to succeed. Each week, teachers discuss the progress of seven students in each key stage and arrive at a strategy to coordinate support for each student. This sharing of information in 'laser' meetings has already shown benefit to individual students' progress and attitude to work.

The action plan created to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the most recent inspection needs some improvement. It does not for example, identify clearly the strategies to reduce boys' exclusions; it does not mention with enough quality, what the academy will do to raise attainment in some key underperforming subjects such as music, geography, history and languages. The time-scales for some of the improvements are impractical, so for example, the plan indicates the academy will improve the quality of middle leadership in just one month. The plan does not have

enough focus on planning a route to be judged as good at the next inspection and misses out some key aspects that need to be improved. For example, to be judged good, students' achievement and the quality of teaching has to be good in all subjects not just English and mathematics. Similarly, to be good, students should have a good understanding of British values through valuing diversity, the rule of law and democracy. There is no mention in the plan of improving the culture to ensure respect for others and that name-calling, banter and derogatory language are not used.

There have been improvements to leadership. However it is still too early to see the impact in improvements in teaching or in students' achievement. Leaders have created a more visible shared-ethos around the academy to help to raise expectations of students' achievement. The curriculum has been strengthened through the futures programme to develop students' skills and readiness for the world of work through a progressive programme of work-related learning, information and guidance.

The review of governance has not taken place and will not be complete until November at the earliest. As a result, there have been few improvements to the quality of governance since the inspection. There is a timetable in place to complete the review, and there have been some initial discussions, but it has taken too long for this important piece of work to take place.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

There has been improvement in the academy's approach to external support. The academy is more outward looking and keen to learn from best practice elsewhere. The local authority is more involved than previously and attends the half-termly achievement board meetings. The risk assessment and safeguarding forms and procedures have improved, in part, because of the external audit and support from Parkwood Academy. Similarly, there have been improvements to the curriculum to raise students' awareness of safeguarding issues and there has been training for staff to make sure all are up-to-date with current national requirements.

The academy's sponsor has taken action to use an experienced leader to work alongside senior leaders as a coach and a mentor but also as a friendly challenge to speed up improvements. There has been some impact of this support in stabilising the staffing and leadership of the academy, in helping to set an ethos of high expectations for students, in arranging support from experts within other EACT academies.

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

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr
Her Majesty's Inspector