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23 September 2014

Mrs Eileen McCarthy
Headteacher
The Co-operative Academy of Leeds
Stoney Rock Lane
Leeds
West Yorkshire
LS9 7HD

Dear Mrs McCarthy

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Co-operative Academy of Leeds, Leeds

Following my visit to your school on 22 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 and 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:

- amend the academy development plan to ensure that all the areas for improvement from the last inspection are clearly identified
- ensure that the revised plan includes specific and discreet monitoring and evaluation procedures
- clarify within the development plan the precise role of governors in ensuring that the actions identified bring about the necessary improvements so that the academy is judged at least good at its next inspection
- forward this revised plan to the monitoring HMI as soon as it is completed and at the latest by the end of the autumn term.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the principal, other senior leaders, a group of governors, and the Director of the Co-operative Academies Trust to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The academy improvement plan was evaluated, as was a range of other documents including an analysis of examination results for 2014, individual subject action plans, minutes of governors' meetings, details of forthcoming training sessions for teachers and para-professionals, and the latest performance data for students currently in Year 11. A tour of the academy, which included visits to a number of faculty areas, was also undertaken.

Context

Since the inspection there have been a number of changes in the teaching staff. At the end of the summer term six teachers left the academy. At the start of the autumn term nine new staff joined the academy, including two Teach First trainees. There are now six newly qualified teachers, four of whom are Teach First trainees in their second year of teaching, and four School Direct trainees undertaking training at the academy. There are currently two vacancies on the governing body, one of which is the responsibility of Leeds City Council. It is disappointing to report that this position has been vacant for some months and it is to be hoped that this situation is dealt with quickly with the appointment of an appropriate individual who can help provide essential support and challenge.

Main findings

Since the inspection, academy leaders have focused on what needs to be achieved to bring about improvement. In relation to teaching and learning, during the summer term the training programme for teaching staff and para-professionals concentrated on strengthening marking and feedback and on improving students' talk for learning. This work is being followed up this term. Senior leaders report that this training is already having a direct impact in classrooms on the way that teachers are giving feedback to students about their work and in improving how teachers strengthen students' preparation for writing. Senior leaders are aware of the importance of using the best practice from within the academy as well as from other schools, within and beyond the Trust, to improve the quality of teaching, further develop skills of leaders and managers and improve the impact of their work on students' achievement. With regard to attendance, academy staff concentrated hard on improving students' attitudes to coming to school. As a result, attendance has started to rise and it is currently above the national average. This bodes well. Academy leaders and governors know what needs to be achieved, have high expectations of all staff, and are focused on improving the consistency and quality of teaching and learning, improving students' behaviour and strengthening the effectiveness of leadership and management.

Senior leaders have amalgamated the areas for improvement identified by the inspection team into their current academy improvement plan. However, the revised plan does not thoroughly identify all aspects of the areas for improvement. In addition, monitoring and evaluation procedures are not identified adequately and the plans give little indication as to precise governor involvement. Monitoring and evaluation procedures are not sharp enough and without amendment cannot be used effectively to hold senior leaders to account. The improvement plan needs to have precise monitoring and evaluation procedures and named individuals or committees that will undertake these tasks. Monitoring and evaluation should be by different people. Academy leaders are well aware that comments on progress made need to focus on the impact of actions upon students' achievement rather than highlighting whether the actions have been completed. Governors have yet to ratify this plan.

Governors receive regular reports from senior leaders and are developing a clear understanding of what needs to be achieved to ensure the academy is judged at least good at its next inspection. They recognise that the academy has made much improvement since it opened. However, they are also well aware that there is much more to do to ensure that all students leave the academy with the best possible prospects for their future. Under the leadership of a newly appointed but experienced chair, governors have decided to revise their committee structure to ensure that they give appropriate support and challenge to the academy. To support this process, they have recently undertaken a skills audit. However, the criteria they will use and the process they will follow to monitor and evaluate the academy development plan are not sufficiently clear.

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

External support

Senior leaders welcome the challenge and support provided by the Co-operative Trust at all levels, in particular the work of the Director of the Trust and the consultants he has engaged to help bring about improvements across the academy. They also value the assistance and advice they can access in the local area, especially the Leeds Cooperative Schools' Network.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Leeds and as below.

Yours sincerely

Michael Maddison

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- DfE - Academies Advisers Unit [open.FREESCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk] - for academies, free schools, UTCs and studio schools