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24 September 2014

Mr Marc Doyle
Acting Principal
South Leeds Academy
Old Run Road
Leeds
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Dear Mr Doyle

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of South Leeds Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 23 September 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 that have been taken since the academy's previous monitoring inspection.

This visit was the third monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in June 2013. 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 the serious weaknesses designation. It is my recommendation that the next inspection be a full section 5 re-inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Leeds.

Yours sincerely

Ian Richardson
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good to ensure attainment at the end of Year 11 continues to rise and all students make at least good progress, by leaders making sure that:
 - staff's expectations of what the students can achieve and the progress they can make are raised
 - all lessons provide all students, regardless of their academic ability, with engaging work which is appropriately challenging and meets their needs and interests, and all do not do the same work
 - teachers ensure students respond to, and implement their feedback and the next steps for learning, and all teachers check how this has moved learning forward as a result
 - all staff use the agreed strategies to develop students' literacy skills in their lessons
 - lesson activities focus on what the students need to learn, not on completing tasks
 - homework is regular and extends students' learning beyond the classroom.

- Sharply focus leadership and management on improving teaching and the progress the students make by:
 - ensuring there is an effective, and rigorous, monitoring of teaching at faculty level to secure consistently good practice.

- Continue to work with parents and carers to improve attendance.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 23 September 2014

Evidence

The inspector met with the Acting Principal with three members of the education advisory board and the academy improvement officer. He carried out a series of short visits to classes around the academy with the Acting Principal and Assistant Principal. The inspector held discussions on performance data with the Acting Principal, the academy improvement officer and a member of the senior leadership team. He had discussions with 11 members of the senior leadership team and interviewed six Year 10 students. The inspection focused on the improvement points from the inspection report.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, the Principal of the academy has resigned. The Acting Principal who was leading the academy at the time of the last monitoring inspection continues in this role. The senior leadership team has been renewed and extended to include a greater number of middle leaders. Around 67 staff have left the academy since the Ofsted Section 5 inspection.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

The academy's development plan continues to be the measure against which improvements are tracked. It is reviewed and amended now on a termly basis, the latest update having been carried out in July before the summer holiday. Initially the academy development plan was generated and held centrally by senior leaders. Since then, it has been a priority of academy leaders for the plan to be disseminated throughout the academy and understood by all staff. In interview with staff, it was clear this aspiration is well on the way to being fully met.

The recently extended senior leadership team is a well-coordinated and thoroughly well-informed group. Its members are aware of the priorities for the academy and describe in detail the systems in place to allow them to contribute to those priorities. The core members of the senior leadership team are confident in their roles and clearly communicate effectively with each other, the extended senior leadership team and the staff in their areas of responsibility. Well to the fore is their recognition of accountability systems now in place in the academy. Throughout the whole academy, monitoring and quality assurance procedures inform planning and staff development. The close scrutiny of performance has helped staff to acquire a realistic understanding of standards attained by their students and of their own effectiveness. Whereas previously there was a clear gap between predictions and actual performance, there is now a closer coherence between the two.

The picture of an improving situation is also seen in the responses of students given in discussions. Students give a very positive view; they rated their academy and the quality of teaching as at least good. They described how they believe teaching has

improved; they are learning more, understand more and are working harder. They have welcomed the recent staff changes and describe how the new teachers make greater demands of them. One student, when describing improvements in behaviour and feeling safe, said: 'You can't get away with much now.' Students were positive about the range of ways they learn now. While students graded no teaching less than good, their strongest approval was given to the marking and feedback they receive from teachers. Students value the efforts teachers make to build relationships and they appreciate how readily staff are willing to help students outside lessons.

The current management and leadership in the academy are strong. Senior leaders provide clear and rational ways forward in bringing about improvement. Staff are involved and engaged in the improvement process. They have great confidence in the academy's senior leaders and describe favourably the way their views are canvassed and contributions welcomed. The returns from a survey on the quality of leadership and management show a very high approval rating with 100% agreeing that the academy has improved since the same time last year. The Board of Trustees continues to support and challenge the academy leaders. The board now includes a member of staff and trustees are looking to continue to increase parental involvement by filling a parent governor vacancy on the board. There is a clear intention to continue to improve parental involvement through more effective communication, including the encouragement for each member of staff to make positive phone calls to parents of students. There is a clear shift in behaviour management from censure to positive feedback and encouragement. Board members are making increased visits to their assigned areas of operation.

Strengths in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- The systems for monitoring teaching and learning are robust and carried out in a consistent way. The quality assurance systems support effective improvement with middle leaders and teachers all having a part to play.
- The replacement of staff that have left the academy has led to an overall improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. The proportion of good or better teaching is now twice as high as it was at the time of the Ofsted inspection in June 2013. There has been a determination to recruit and appoint only good teachers.
- Attendance has improved since the inspection as has students' behaviour, which is evident in the great reduction of exclusions. This is a consequence of a shift in emphasis to greater rewards, a thorough approach to analysis of attendance and involving parents more.
- In walking around the buildings and visiting classrooms, there are higher levels of application and a more positive atmosphere for learning compared to previous monitoring inspections. There is a whole-staff contribution to building relationships with students.
- The more positive attitudes and relationships are being further developed through the trialing of a coaching programme, in which all staff on a Monday

morning work for 45 minutes with vertically streamed groups to share what students have experienced at home and in the academy.

- Standards of attainment and of progress are showing an upward trend while attainment on entry remains well below national averages.
- The performance data of students are closely analysed and feedback given to students on how to improve. The students have welcomed the 'red for reflection' initiative and describe how much this opportunity to communicate their own evaluations with the teacher is helping them to improve.
- There is good collaboration with other academies in matters of moderation and shared training opportunities. The headteachers of local primary academies are now meeting with academy leaders.
- The analysis of performance data is thorough and based on data collected at six points in the year. The analysis has informed planning for individuals and the decisions taken over curriculum pathways and provision.
- There is a strong and shared vision for the academy that underpins planning and management decisions and informs teachers' efforts to bring about improvement. Staff freely share their views, feel their views are heard and recognise the effectiveness of leaders in taking account of them.

External support

Beyond the support offered by the Board of Trustees, there is external support offered through the sponsor, the School Partnership Trust Academies. The sponsor has a core improvement team that engages with the academy leaders. There is challenge and support for the leadership team provided by the regional director of education and the academy improvement officer. Two officers of the local authority are members of the Board of Trustees. The academy collaborates well with other academies and mutually gives and receives support.