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11 December 2014

Mrs Nikki Shaw  
Executive Principal  
Barnsley Academy  
Farm Road  
Kendray  
Barnsley  
South Yorkshire  
S70 3DL

Dear Mrs Shaw

### **Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Barnsley Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 8 and 9 December 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 which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in February 2014. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weakness designation.

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 School Improvement Board (SIB), the local authority and the Department for Education Academies Advisers Trust.

Yours sincerely

Terry Holland

**Additional Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2014:**

- Improve the quality of teaching in the Key Stages 3 and 4 and the sixth form so that it is consistently good with more that is outstanding to raise achievement further by ensuring that:
  - information gathered on students' progress is used more effectively by teachers in their planning to set work for students that is appropriately challenging in the main academy, and especially in Key Stage 4
  - the focus and the variety of learning activities always keep students fully involved and stimulates their interest
  - the questions that teachers ask of students always make them think deeply and encourage the students to give reasoned and extended answers
  - the quality of marking and feedback to students in the main academy is consistent in making clear to students what they need to do to improve their work and in insisting on neatness and pride in the presentation of their work
  - teaching in the sixth form gives students more opportunities to find things out for themselves and to develop the skills they will need in higher education.
  
- Further close the gap in achievement between disadvantaged students and other students in the academy, especially in Key Stage 4, by:
  - making sure that pupil premium funding is used with a much sharper focus on meeting disadvantaged students' needs
  - ensuring that disadvantaged students attend as regularly as other students, especially in Years 10 and 11.
  
- Improve behaviour in lessons, especially in less-able teaching groups, by:
  - making sure that all students are fully aware of what is unacceptable behaviour and that teachers are consistent in the way they manage poor behaviour
  - giving the importance of good behaviour, manners and respect a much higher profile across the academy
  - making more effective use of tutor and enrichment time to encourage good behaviour and to enhance students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
  
- Improve leadership and management including governance further by:
  - holding subject leaders more rigorously to account for improving teaching and standards in their subject areas
  - ensuring that the new school improvement board holds senior leaders and managers rigorously to account.

An external review of governance and an external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and governance may be improved.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 8 and 9 December 2014**

### **Evidence**

The inspector observed the school's work and teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4. He visited four lessons, including English and mathematics classes. All lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. The inspector scrutinised documents including student achievement and progress information, students' books, and attendance and exclusion records. He also reviewed the updated school improvement plan (SIP), the sponsor's and senior leaders' evaluations of the school's work and progress to date and the specific action plan for spring term 2015. The inspector met with the Executive Principal, members of the senior leadership team, including leaders of all priority areas for improvement, advisors, consultants and lead officers from the sponsor, United Learning, commissioned to support the academy and the current Chair of the SIB who is also a representative of the local authority.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection on 30 June 2014 the shadow local governing body has been formally disbanded, with governance as well as oversight of the academy's improvement now being wholly exercised through the SIB. Twenty eight staff have left the academy, many previously occupying middle management posts, and 16 new staff are in post or taking up their posts in January.

### **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

The Executive Principal and the restructured senior leadership team continue to have a very clear view of what needs to be done to improve learning at the school and to address the points for improvement identified in the section 5 inspection report. Senior leaders have remained firm in implementing the actions needed to begin to improve teaching and behaviour, and to raise standards, especially for disadvantaged pupils. However, the extent to which change and improvement was needed at many levels within the academy has been greater than initially anticipated. With the substantial support of the sponsor a great deal has been achieved since the previous section 5 inspection and particularly since September, and leaders know very clearly where further improvement is required. There is now a clear culture of accountability evident at all levels of the academy. The work needed to put the required structures in place and provide the appropriate springboard for the academy has taken place. It is now ready to undertake the more detailed work and developments needed to improve further its performance and the outcomes for its students. The plans, programmes and specific actions needed to achieve this are robust and begin from January 2015.

The actions of the Executive Principal and sponsor, in conjunction with the local authority, in brokering links with other schools offering excellent practice regionally and locally have had a major impact. As a result the great majority of the key

actions in the SIP to address the areas for development identified by the section 5 inspection have been successfully initiated and are now firmly embedded.

The systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching have become more rigorous and the academy's picture of the quality of teaching is more robust and accurate. A formal programme of monitoring and performance management is now being implemented. The criteria applied to its monitoring of teaching and performance management focus clearly on helping teachers improve the differentiation of tasks to ensure that pupils of all abilities are given work that challenges them and are performing to the best of their abilities. An in-house programme of training and support for all staff beginning in January will focus on the most effective use of assessment data to inform teaching and planning to maximise students' learning and progress, and on the constructive and developmental use of marking and feedback. Almost all the teaching seen during this monitoring inspection was good or better. Nonetheless, the academy is aware that the impact of some teaching is still inadequate, much still requires improvement and that there continues to be inconsistency in the performance of some teachers. Leaders are clearly focused on the actions needed to raise the quality of all teaching to at least good.

The school's data indicate that the actions to halt the decline in achievement have been successful. This year's GCSE results mean the academy is meeting the government's floor targets for five A\* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics. The gap between disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium also narrowed quite significantly. However, the legacy of underachievement and low expectations reported by the last section 5 inspection continues to have an impact. The GCSE results are generally still well-below national averages and the proportion of students making the expected progress continues to be too low. The academy is well aware that the achievement of students throughout the school needs further improvement and remains a clear target for the next stage of developments.

Nonetheless, clear improvements have been made in the monitoring of achievement. The academy's data on attainment and the progress being made by students are now accurate and based on more consistent and robust use of assessment. This has revealed even greater challenges in securing the improvements needed, for example, in assuring the progress of students supported by the pupil premium who make up half the overall student population and over half of the current Year 11 cohort. This greater clarity and accuracy in the data has ensured that the academy has robust, comprehensive and extremely well-integrated strategies and actions now in place to help all pupils to achieve their potential. Middle leaders are now fully aware of their responsibilities, and their accountability, for improving the quality of teaching and achievement, and the accurate assessment and moderation of students' work.

Very significant progress has been made in tackling the endemic problems in behaviour identified by the last section 5 inspection. A behaviour policy is in place,

which sets clear expectations and action for both staff and students alike. This has been mirrored by a sea change in the approach to working with students on behaviour. This places the emphasis on students taking personal responsibility for managing their behaviour alongside more carefully tiered levels of support and intervention for students who struggle with their behaviour. As a result the academy's data show a significant reduction in internal exclusions from classes and in day-to-day sanctions for poor behaviour. The impact of this increased support and engagement with students is already evident in the very significant rise in parental engagement with the school and in levels of attendance. Attendance has risen steadily and is now close to the national average. Persistent absence by a small number of students, however, remains a problem. The number of temporary exclusions at the academy has, historically, been below that nationally. However, there are some students, particularly in the current Year 11, who have come to expect a lower threshold of acceptable behaviour and are testing the academy's resolve. The academy is, rightly, holding firm on its policy and approach and the number of managed exclusions is likely to rise.

The SIB continues to provide good support and to be a highly effective body in its monitoring and evaluation of the academy's progress and in assuring that the necessary improvements are made. Governors are still represented on the SIB and changes to its structure now mean that more members of the previous governing body are directly involved in monitoring the impact of specific priorities for improvement and the academy's overall progress against the challenging targets set in the improvement plan.

### **Strengths in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:**

- The Executive Principal, with her senior staff, provide very strong leadership, a clear vision and the determination needed to bring about the improvements necessary. The strategic thinking underpinning the extensive restructuring of management and staffing that has taken place has established clearer lines of accountability. Leaders throughout the school are now fully aware of their professional roles and responsibilities in raising the achievement of all students and taking forward the academy's improvement programme.
- The willingness on the part of the academy and the sponsor to draw on professional expertise locally and nationally has helped to bolster and develop the programmes for improvement of: teaching and learning; performance management; more systematic approaches to assessing students' progress and achievement; and the associated curriculum planning to enhance continuity and progression of learning within and across subjects.
- Disciplined and conscientious work has been undertaken to ensure that assessment information is now more accurate and secure. This has led to more realistic analysis of the academy's potential performance and targets and, most importantly, to better informed and robust strategies to improve the progress of students and enable them to achieve to their full potential. The greater emphasis on individual students' progress has helped senior staff to sharpen their focus on the performance of different groups of students and to enhance the integration

of support provided, particularly for those requiring specific support for their learning and behaviour, and those who are supported by the pupil premium. As a consequence, the performance of many students in both these groups has begun to improve since the previous section 5 inspection.

- The rigorous and systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of the use of pupil premium funding has resulted in a clear action plan that successfully interweaves all the relevant strands of academic and pastoral support for these students. Actions include better targeted support devoted to improving literacy skills throughout the academy and particularly in Years 7 and 8, and external support being commissioned to enhance mathematical skills in Key Stage 4.
- Leaders have established clearer criteria and a consistent understanding among staff of the basis for monitoring teaching and the associated expectations of effective practice and targets within performance management. These fully reflect the areas of improvement, actions and targets in the SIP.
- In conjunction with this, the in-house training and performance management programmes that have been developed and are now ready to be put into practice are well-structured, comprehensive, very well integrated and clearly have the potential to improve practice across the academy.
- The academy's programme of support for curriculum and subject leaders has been rigorous and challenging and has resulted in greater awareness of their leadership and management roles. There is now a better understanding of collective responsibility and accountability among subject leaders for the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects and their contribution to the academy's overall improvement.
- In the majority of lessons seen during this monitoring inspection, it was evident that more ambitious targets are now being set and regularly discussed with the students. As a result, in these lessons, expectations of their performance and progress were higher.
- Behaviour and attendance are generally improving. The number of fixed-term exclusions has increased recently, but this is as a result of the behaviour policy and standards of expected behaviour being consistently applied.
- The carefully integrated planning and provision of support to students who are most vulnerable emotionally and whose behaviour and attendance are often affected by a complex set of factors, has had a very positive impact on both behaviour and attendance. It has also resulted in significant increases in the engagement of parents and working in partnership with families and the community the academy serves.
- The impact of the tiered levels of support and intervention, for example through the nurture centre, internal exclusion room and 'Back on Track' room, and the employment of a full-time social worker to liaise with and support students and their families, has been central to these improvements.
- As a result, in the midst of necessary change, the academy has maintained and in key respects fundamentally improved its safeguarding, inclusion, support and care for its students, especially those who are most at risk of underachieving.

## **Weaknesses in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:**

The following areas will form a particular focus at the next monitoring inspection:

- Although the decline in attainment has been halted, the academy and SIB are aware that progress of students throughout the academy, and particularly of the large number supported by the pupil premium, still needs further improvement.
- The academy's picture of the quality of teaching in the academy is now accurate. It is evident that the teaching of many staff has the capacity to improve, but the academy is aware that the current performance of some staff is inadequate or still too variable. The significant efforts to support these staff need to result in the quality of teaching improving consistently.
- Students' achievement and progress in mathematics remains too low. Changes to the management and leadership of the subject need to have a positive impact on students' progress throughout the school.
- Students' work books show that some marking is becoming more developmental and better used to consolidate learning. This practice is still new and evolving and is still too variable. The academy is aware that this needs embedding to ensure that its implementation and impact are more consistent and effective.
- Despite improvements in behaviour, the academy is well aware of the continuing impact of the legacy of previous expectations and behaviour management. Further improvement is still needed in the consistent management of low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons and application of effective behaviour strategies by all staff.
- The rate of persistent absence is still too high. The academy's planned actions to address this problem will need to demonstrate impact.
- The academy has taken significant steps and is now poised to implement effective strategies for further improvement. However, these will need time to be embedded and to have proven and sustained impact. The very ambitious target for removal of the serious weakness designation within 18 months is no longer realistic. The academy and SIB are aware that the full allotted period of 24 months is both more sensible and achievable. The SIP needs to be amended to reflect this.

## **External support**

United Learning provides excellent support strategically, financially and in the resources it provides. The sponsor's support for the Executive Principal has been seminal, both in resourcing and financing the restructuring that has taken place and in enabling her to access additional support from senior practitioners to help key developments to continue alongside the restructuring. Examples include the continuing work of the sponsor's school improvement advisor and, more recently, the commissioned support of an executive headteacher of two local primary schools. Both have had significant impact in providing additional support to the senior leaders. Their monitoring and quality assurance work has also helped to strengthen teaching and learning and secure necessary developments in middle management and subject leadership; and in preparing to implement performance management arrangements. The backing of the sponsor has also enabled the Executive Principal

to draw on, and draw in, expertise and best practice from a wide range of sources to help the academy to make rapid improvements in a number of its practices, not least in its pastoral support to both students and families and in attendance and behaviour management. The local authority has also worked closely and effectively with the academy and the sponsor to help draw on expertise and support from local schools and Barnsley College. As a result, the academy is no longer isolated and is actively engaged in the local community of schools in order to provide the best education for its students.