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Jane Gotschel
Executive Headteacher
Lordswood Boys' School
Hagley Road
Birmingham
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Dear Mrs Gotschel

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lordswood Boys' School

Following my visit to your academy on 21 January 2015, 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 academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place on 25 September 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher and other senior leaders, and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body. Representatives from the school improvement team were involved in meetings which included leaders from the partner academy, Lordswood Girls' School, which is providing support through the Lordswood Trust. The statement of action and the academy's action plan are combined in one document known as the Ofsted action plan. This was evaluated during the visit.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection you have continued to receive leadership support from the partner academy in the Trust. The executive headteacher arrangement at the time of the inspection has continued. You have restructured the roles of your senior leaders and there are several temporary appointments involving leaders from the partner academy. A new permanent staffing structure is being planned for September 2015. One assistant headteacher left the academy at the end of the autumn term. There is currently an acting subject leader in English due to the ongoing long-term absence of the head of English. There is no current permanent post-holder in mathematics, and leadership of this core subject area is overseen by the head of mathematics from the partner academy.

The academy has been affected by a decline in numbers, with far fewer students starting in the academy each year than completing Key Stage 4. The current Year 7 has fewer than half of the number of students in Year 11. This change is having a significant impact on the academy's financial situation, which has been supported through the Trust.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leaders, including governors, have been slow to take decisive action to address the areas for improvement from the inspection. They have clear plans for the actions needed, but monitoring is weak and the difference these actions will make to improving students' achievement is unclear.

The new arrangements for senior leaders' roles have only recently been introduced, and the two temporary assistant headteachers have been in post for just two weeks. However, they know the challenges that lie ahead as they have previously worked with the academy in their roles as specialist leaders of education (SLEs). The plans to restructure leadership extend to all leaders, and an external consultant has carried out a review of teaching and learning responsibility payments. Consultation on this restructure is due to start shortly, but in the meantime workloads are not equally allocated due to over-staffing in some areas of the academy. Teachers with more than the usual allocation of 'non-contact' time have, very recently, been deployed to support groups of underachieving students. However, it is too early to see if this is making any difference to students' progress.

The external review of governance has only very recently been carried out and the report has not yet been published. This is likely to recommend a restructuring of governance to bring greater consistency and continuity in governors' roles across the Trust. In the interim, governors have had training in the use of assessment

information and an update on keeping children safe in education. The recommended review of the use of pupil premium funding has been planned to take place shortly.

Plans to develop teaching are at the very early stages of introduction, and are being led by the two temporary assistant headteachers. They quickly identified that leaders' judgements on the quality of teaching were inaccurate and based on infrequent observations or checks on teaching, including the reviews of students' work in their books. A new fortnightly cycle of short visits to lessons has been introduced and a database of judgements made on the basis of this information is gradually being developed. However, there is not yet sufficient emphasis, or weighting, given to the students' achievements or the progress they make.

Senior leaders recognise that assessment information has been inaccurate for some time. They are unable to use this information with any confidence to identify where extra support needed or to indicate possible outcomes in external examinations. This situation is yet to improve, and there is little evidence of any robust checking of assessments through external partners. Some progress has been made on improving the accuracy of assessments in geography, languages, and in English. However, there is no consistent approach to checking on the accuracy of assessments across the academy and this needs to be addressed urgently.

Confusion exists about the way in which targets are set for students. Senior leaders cannot yet be confident that targets set for all students in all subjects are sufficiently challenging, and will lead to all students making at least the progress that is expected of them. Meanwhile, teachers' expectations of the work students can tackle may be too low. Indications of students' outcomes for 2015 suggest little improvement compared with those of 2014, and the academy is unlikely to meet floor standards. Very few students in Year 11 are making the progress that is expected of them in English and mathematics.

The academy is heavily reliant on the support provided by the partner academy in the Trust, and through two recently retired headteachers who have been acting as consultants to its leaders. In addition to the proposed staffing restructure, the timetable has recently been rewritten to reduce the number of double and triple lessons. Leaders say this is leading to more engagement and better behaviour in lessons. New schemes of work have been introduced to improve students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural experiences and the teaching of citizenship.

The Ofsted action plan is not a useful document to support governors in identifying the progress made by the academy. Although the key actions tackle the areas for improvement from the inspection, monitoring is weak. There are no identified milestones against which governors can evaluate the effectiveness of actions, and it is unclear who will be responsible for the monitoring of the actions or when this will

take place. The cost of carrying out the actions forms a separate document which has been discussed by the Trust.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The academy is not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

The academy's Ofsted action plan is not fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector