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22 January 2015

Ms Helen Morgan
Headteacher
Hipperholme and Lightcliffe High School
Stoney Lane, Lightcliffe
West Yorkshire
HX3 8TL

Dear Ms Morgan

Special measures monitoring inspection of Hipperholme and Lightcliffe High School

Following my visit with Kathleen Harris and Tudor Griffiths, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 20 and 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:
The academy is not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures.

I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Maddison
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching, including in the sixth form, so that it is at least consistently good and enables all students to achieve well, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - use accurate performance information to plan and set work that matches the needs and abilities of students more closely, especially those with special educational needs
 - have high expectations of what all students can achieve, especially boys, those supported by the pupil premium funding and the most able students
 - mark students' books regularly in order to provide them with the advice they need to improve their work and learning and that they require their students to act on this advice
 - focus on helping students to practise and improve their literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects that they study.

- Swiftly improve students' behaviour and safety, including their attendance, by developing effective practices to:
 - reduce the numbers of students who are regularly absent from school, particularly those supported by pupil premium funding and those with special educational needs
 - reduce the number of students who are late for school especially those in Key Stage 4
 - ensure improving poor behaviour is given the highest priority.

- Rapidly improve the impact of leaders and managers, including governance, by ensuring:
 - there is a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching and students' achievement
 - inadequate teaching is eradicated and that which requires improvement is improved
 - that governors hold leaders and managers rigorously to account for students' achievement particularly in English, mathematics, science and geography and for their behaviour and safety across the school
 - pupil premium funding is used effectively to improve the achievement, behaviour and attendance of those students supported by the funding.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Ofsted will make recommendations on governance to the authority responsible for the school.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 20 and 21 January 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work and met with the headteacher, the interim executive headteacher, the Chair and a group of governors, senior leaders, subject leaders, individual teaching and support staff, and an external consultant undertaking work at the academy. They visited 25 full and part-lessons, of which three were joint observations with senior leaders, attended an assembly and spoke informally to many students, as well as having formal meetings with students representing Years 7, 9 and 11. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including: unvalidated GCSE and post-16 results for 2014; information about students' current achievement; the new raising attainment plan; performance management information, details of the training programme for staff, minutes of governors' meetings; and the reviews of governance and the pupil premium. They looked at students' work in classes as well as in a separate work scrutiny in mathematics. Inspectors focused principally on Key Stages 3 and 4 and not on the sixth form, which will be a particular focus in a future inspection.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection there have been a number of changes in staffing. At the end of the autumn term, six staff left the academy, including the subject leaders of physics and science. At the start of the spring term, eight new teachers joined the academy. In November 2014, the executive Principal of Abbey Grange Multi Academy Trust was appointed as interim executive headteacher of the academy. This is an interim appointment because the academy is in the process of converting to sponsored academy status with the Abbey Multi Academy Trust.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Achievement continues to be inadequate and students are not making sufficient progress. Unvalidated GCSE results for 2014 were disappointing. Analysis of those results reveals that, given students' prior achievement and their starting points, attainment is not high enough in English, mathematics and science. Students attained more highly in several of the foundation subjects. In relation to progress, there was a slight improvement in the proportion of students making expected progress in English, but in mathematics the proportion fell. The gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged students and those who are not narrowed in both English and mathematics, but the gaps are still far too wide. In the sixth form achievement improved slightly in 2014. However, achievement is far too variable and too many students continue to underperform both at GCSE and at A-level.

The most recent assessment of students' performance suggests that more students are on track to meet their targets this summer in Year 11 and in the sixth form. This is because senior leaders have made some progress in raising achievement. The

approach to setting students' targets and the systems for tracking and monitoring students' performance has been overhauled. Action to improve the quality of teaching is starting to have a positive impact on achievement. There is a copious amount of data available showing students' attainment and progress. However, teaching staff are not yet using these data well enough to plan effective lessons which challenge all students equally well. This is partly because they are not fully clear how to use these data. It is also because senior leaders are only just starting to analyse the data comprehensively and produce linked and consequential actions, based on the messages gleaned from the analysis, which clearly identify individual students and groups of students in need of specific support and focused intervention. Senior leaders are becoming more aware of how well students are doing and are responding appropriately, but this work is in its early stages and is not yet having the sustained impact required across the academy.

In lessons students' rates of progress are beginning to increase because of recent improvements to teaching. In a number of lessons inspectors observed students achieve more because tasks are better adapted to help them achieve and, as a result, they have more positive attitudes to learning. However, too many students are underachieving because expectations are not high enough and in too many lessons there is insufficient challenge, especially for the higher attainers

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving. Students told inspectors that they are enjoying their learning more and feel that they are doing better because teaching is getting better. Where learning is most effective, students benefit from well-crafted questions posed by teachers which probe their thinking and develop their knowledge and understanding. In these lessons teachers have high expectations, provide challenge for all students and adopt a pace which allows students to make at least expected progress and sustained gains in their learning. Where learning is less effective, activities do not always match the abilities of the students. There is careful support for those who need more assistance with their work and inspectors observed teaching assistants helping students to learn well. However, the challenge for higher attaining students was variable. Expectations are not high enough for them and they are not being given work regularly which allows them to make more than expected progress. Marking and feedback are improving and many staff are using the 'what went well' and 'even better if' approach to identify strengths and next steps for each student. However, this practice is not universal and staff are not always providing students with guidance on how to improve, nor are they following through students' reflections on any initial marking to ensure that what the students have added is accurate.

Teachers are being provided with an increasing amount of data on the students they teach. However, too many are not yet using this information to assess students' starting points for each lesson, decide the new knowledge which should be learned and select the most appropriate activities to ensure that the students make progress

in their learning. Senior leaders are aware of this and are focused on providing those staff who need it with support and guidance. Nevertheless, teaching is improving and much of this is due to the training programme put in place to help teachers improve their practice. The approaches adopted mean that training can be personalised so that individual teachers benefit from advice which helps them improve their weaker practice. The introduction of the 'Teaching Gallery', which allows staff to observe their colleagues and the dissemination of best practice, is helping to move teaching forward. Although work has been undertaken on most of the areas for improvement related to the quality of teaching, action to improve students' literacy and especially their numeracy across the curriculum is underdeveloped. The next monitoring inspection will pay particular attention to this aspect of the improvement agenda.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The strategies introduced by the academy to improve students' attendance are beginning to bring about positive results. Attendance is improving, but the gaps between the attendance of groups of students, for example, those who are disadvantaged and those who are not, are still too wide. The strategies adopted include more effective use of the academy's own educational welfare officer in chasing up students whose patterns of attendance and punctuality give cause for concern and in creating closer links with the families of such students. At the same time, considerable effort is being placed on rewarding students for high attendance, an initiative which students told inspectors they liked. Despite these steps forward, senior leaders are aware that more needs to be done to improve both attendance and punctuality. For example, disadvantaged students are still overrepresented in the numbers who are late each day. As part of its work to ensure that students attend more regularly, senior leaders are reviewing current procedures for checking on students' attendance on a daily basis and how they follow up absences revealed by that process.

Students' behaviour around the academy and in classrooms is improving, not least because teaching is more engaging for students and the academy is focusing on improving students' attitudes to their work, as well as how they interact with each other and with adults. The behaviour policy has been revised and relaunched and a formal system for recording poor behaviour is providing senior leaders with more accurate information on what is going on around the academy. However, this system will not be reliable until all staff use it consistently. Older students commented that, although they initially disliked the ban on using mobile phones during the day, this has been beneficial because it has led them to talk more to each other! Expectations of students' behaviour are now much higher. However, students report that teachers are inconsistent in how they apply the behaviour sanctions and that in some classes poor behaviour continues to affect adversely the progress of those who want to learn.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Senior leaders and governors are determined to bring about improvements in students' achievement. Since the last monitoring inspection they have begun to put in place a range of actions to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the last full inspection. They have provided appropriate training for teachers and thus started to raise the quality of teaching. They have ensured that more students attend regularly and fewer are late to the academy so that they can benefit from the improved teaching. A series of non-negotiable expectations has been drawn up to help ensure that staff plan and teach more effective lessons. Senior leaders have a better grasp of the importance of assessing the impact of actions and not just their completion. Together this work is starting to bring about improvements in achievement, but much of this work is at an early stage and its impact is variable and not yet embedded. In their accurate and detailed self-evaluation, senior leaders acknowledge that there is much to do and judge that the academy is still inadequate in all aspects of the inspection evaluation schedule.

Part of the reason for the lack of impact is that senior leadership structures have yet to be refined, following the criticism made at the last monitoring inspection that there was insufficient distinction between the roles of senior leaders, a lack of clarity in their work, and a considerable likelihood of the unnecessary duplication of effort. A restructuring of leadership posts is envisaged, but not until the academy's status is resolved. It is still a matter of considerable worry that the process of confirming the sponsorship of the academy by the Abbey Multi Academy Trust has not been finalised. As identified at the first monitoring inspection, this uncertainty hinders the full implementation of the much-needed improvement agenda. A resolution of this issue is urgently required.

Since the appointment of the interim executive headteacher, a new raising attainment plan has been drawn up which replaces the post-Ofsted action plan created following the inspection last year. This new plan covers all of the areas for improvement and identifies actions which focus clearly and directly on what the academy needs to do to improve. Precise success criteria are provided along with costings, named individuals responsible for each section and clear milestones to guide the process of monitoring and evaluation.

Governors are increasingly aware of their role and responsibilities in ensuring high standards of education and care for all students. They have responded to the criticisms made at the time of the full inspection and the first monitoring inspection. Improving governance is now part of the new academy's raising attainment plan. The restructured committees are clearly aligned to the areas for improvement. Despite the delay in finalising the status of the academy, governors have appointed the executive Principal of the Abbey Multi Academy Trust as interim executive headteacher and invited two governors from the trust to attend the meetings of the academy's governing body.

The review of the use and impact of the pupil premium (additional government money used to support disadvantaged students) has now taken place, but the report has not yet been presented to governors for ratification. A named governor will liaise with senior leaders to determine actions emanating from this report. All this needs to happen soon because nine months have elapsed since the inspection, when this was made an area for improvement. Future monitoring inspections will focus closely on the impact of any actions to support the improved education and care for disadvantaged students.

One recommendation of the review of governance was that 'governance needs to move from a passive role of receiving information to a proactive one based on scrutiny, challenge and active inquiry'. The evidence presented at this monitoring inspection suggests that much more has to be accomplished to bring about this fundamental shift in the attitudes and behaviour of all members of the governing body. Governors interviewed on this inspection demonstrate that they are beginning to appreciate the seriousness of the situation facing the academy. Nevertheless, it is extremely disappointing that no governor was available to attend the feedback at the end of the monitoring inspection. Although no governors are acting as inhibitors of changes proposed, not all governors are yet acting fully as promoters and facilitators of those changes. Governors cannot afford to be complacent and need to exhibit a greater sense of urgency to ensure that the improvements required are brought about as rapidly as possible.

External support

The academy is receiving a considerable amount of external support from a range of staff from Abbey Multi Academy Trust. In particular, the interim executive headteacher is undertaking a leading role in overseeing the improvement agenda and in providing essential strategic leadership and fundamental advice and guidance to the academy's senior leaders. Her commitment and determination, as well as that of her staff, is much appreciated by senior leaders, staff and governors at the academy. Staff are also benefiting from a number of external consultants, all of whom are providing much-needed assistance to the academy.