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22 January 2015

Mr Stephen Henry
Principal
Fulwood Academy
Black Bull Lane
Fulwood, Preston
Lancashire
PR2 9YR

Dear Mr Henry

Special measures monitoring inspection of Fulwood Academy

Following my visit with Julie Yarwood, Her Majesty's Inspector, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2013. 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 making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures. I strongly recommend that the academy seeks to appoint newly qualified teachers only in those subjects where there is proven leadership capacity.

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 sponsor, the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Interim Executive Director for Children & Young People for Lancashire.

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching so that it is at least good or better in order to accelerate progress quickly for all groups of students, especially in mathematics and English by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have consistently high expectations of students and set demanding tasks
 - staff use information on students' progress to check more rigorously that students are doing well enough
 - teachers plan lessons carefully to get the most out of all students, including the most able and those that need additional support
 - the pace and challenge of learning in lessons increases
 - teachers provide more opportunities for students to find things out for themselves and improve their independent learning skills
 - those students who require additional help with their learning receive effective support
 - that teachers' marking gives students useful guidance on how to improve in the subject.

- Raise standards, in mathematics and English, by making sure that:
 - learning for students in mathematics is practical and meaningful, and involves them in working things out for themselves
 - teachers adopt a consistent approach to improving students' skills in speaking, writing, spelling and numeracy in subjects across the curriculum.

- Improve the effectiveness of senior and middle leaders, and bring greater urgency to the drive to improve achievement, by:
 - ensuring the accuracy of the academy's self-evaluation, particularly in judging students' progress and the impact of teaching on progress over time
 - improving the quality of teaching so that it is good enough to help students make up for prior underachievement
 - ensuring all teachers have high enough expectations of what students can achieve
 - ensuring that leaders track students' progress more closely in order to identify underachievement more quickly
 - ensuring middle leaders are held accountable for the progress students make, and the effectiveness of teaching, in their areas of responsibility
 - making sure leaders of subjects hold class teachers to account for the progress students make
 - taking firm action to deal with any inadequate teaching.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 20 -21 January 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met the Principal, senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers, the special educational needs coordinator, groups of students and two members of the governing body. Telephone discussions were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and the sponsor. Inspectors visited a range of lessons to observe students' learning in different subjects and they scrutinised some students' exercise books. Visits were made to assemblies and tutorial sessions. Inspectors considered the academy's procedures to keep students safe and looked at behaviour and attendance records.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, two teachers have left the academy. Three new teachers have joined the academy on a permanent basis, in sociology, science, health and social care and a temporary teacher of geography has been appointed to provide maternity leave cover. The roles of senior leaders have been rationalised. An acting head of mathematics has been appointed from within the mathematics department. The acting head of English at the time of the last monitoring inspection has now been made permanent. A new head of sixth form will join the academy in April 2015. Student numbers remain stable.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The achievement of students who left the academy in 2014 was below the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations of students' attainment and progress. Achievement in mathematics was much lower than in English. Attainment in geography and history was significantly below average, whereas there was a more positive picture in science. Some students who secured A* to C GCSE grades in English and mathematics did not attain five good grades overall. The gap in attainment between disadvantaged students and their peers remained wide.

Academy leaders have undertaken a careful analysis of students' performance and taken appropriate steps to ensure that achievement in 2015 is better. These actions include: improvements to schemes of work; more systematic approaches to revision and assessment; and the reorganisation of some classes. The achievement of students currently attending the academy, as shown by the academy's current tracking data, is improving across subjects and there is confidence that 2015 outcomes will represent a stronger picture than those of 2014. Achievement in mathematics remains weaker than in English. Accelerating students' progress in mathematics is a concerted academy focus. There is a strong drive to raise achievement across subjects as a matter of urgency. Inspection evidence from

lesson observations and scrutiny of students' work indicates that students' achievement is improving.

Achievement in the sixth form was low in 2014, but is improving due to more focused teaching, a reduced curriculum and better arrangements for careers advice and guidance that mean students enrol for courses that better meet their needs and aspirations. Tracking of achievement in the sixth form has improved recently and the reintroduction of 'catch up cards' to tackle underperformance is valued by students as a means of preventing them falling behind in their work.

Across the academy, action is being taken to support students who have low levels of literacy. The recently appointed special educational needs coordinator has revised and improved the way in which students are supported and training for academy staff is equipping teachers and support staff with better skills to meet students' needs. There is more to be done to ensure that the needs of these students are effectively met in all subjects through clear communication between teachers and teaching assistants, so that everyone knows their role in helping students during lessons.

The quality of teaching

Teaching remains variable, but is improving. A comprehensive programme of continuing professional development is enabling teachers to learn from the most effective practice in the academy and refine their skills more systematically.

Students commented that they feel particularly well challenged when teachers make learning 'interesting and fun.' Events, such as the enrichment days in English, have inspired students' thinking; these are complemented by lessons where high standards of accuracy and presentation are fundamental expectations, but where enjoyment of reading is fostered too. Teaching in mathematics is improving and inspectors saw increasingly strong aspirations across different classes. Mathematics teachers are giving careful thought as to how best to embed and build on students' knowledge and skills. Good sequencing of activities enabled Year 11 students to develop their understanding of vectors. Students who spoke with inspectors confirmed that more is being expected of them now in mathematics, in terms of the work they complete in class and at home.

Increasingly, teachers are finding ways to engage students' interest. In design technology, a powerful example was seen of students' creativity being encouraged when they designed and made board games; they were supported well by a teaching assistant who had been briefed effectively on the structure and expectations of the lesson. Furthermore, students were inspired by the teacher's infectious enthusiasm and commitment to quality. In geography, students enjoyed sharing their information about trade and development and taught each other through well-paced question and answer sessions.

On some occasions, students' learning slows when they are not given time to reflect on the skills they have developed or the knowledge they have gained. Teachers' questioning does not always engage all students; consequently, misconceptions sometimes persist in students' understanding.

The school's personal development and citizenship programme has been redesigned to provide more structured opportunities for students to explore and debate pertinent issues and 'big questions', such as, whether Athenian democracy would work in Britain. Some good quality stimulus materials have been produced but, on occasions, there is reluctance during tutorial sessions for students to contribute their ideas and not all teachers are successful in promoting debate.

The quality of teachers' marking continues to improve, with effective practice particularly evident in English, characterised by students taking strong action in response to their teachers' feedback. In some subjects, such as art, there is an over-reliance on students assessing their own work and the work of their peers. Where there is an imbalance between self- and peer-assessment and high quality teacher feedback, students do not benefit from very precise guidance as to how to improve.

Independent working is promoted well in English where students have a 'helpdesk,' designed by the head of English, to support their writing. The design technology department is using this model to create a similar resource; this is one example of how teachers are supporting each other's professional development through the academy's teaching and learning group.

Academy leaders acknowledge the need to bring the same pace and rigour to the development of teaching that has secured rapid improvement in students' behaviour. A stable and experienced leadership team is now in place with the will and skills to revisit the principles of high quality teaching and learning, support teachers' professional development and challenge underperformance.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Most students behave well, respect each other, work harmoniously together and display a genuine enthusiasm for learning. They have noticed the additional challenge that is being presented to them by staff to achieve their best and the vast majority have risen to higher expectations. No time is lost through lateness to lessons. Attendance is above the national average and virtually no students are excluded for poor behaviour. The quality of presentation of students' work has improved, although there is some variability dependent on teachers' expectations; an increasing amount of students' work is displayed around the building. The leadership and management of behaviour and attendance are rigorous and very effective. The house system is valued, creating a spirit of healthy competition while enabling close checks to be kept on individual students.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The Principal's leadership continues to inspire and energise the academy. The mantra 'Aim high, work hard, be nice, no excuses' is regularly reiterated and underpins the decisions senior leaders make, as well as the work of teachers and students. The senior leadership team's roles and responsibilities have been reorganised so that there is clarity and accountability. All senior leaders demonstrate a commitment to securing rapid improvement. Their activities are focused and they are held to account by each other, the principal, the governing body and the improvement partner with both depth and frequency.

Several of the academy's subject leaders are temporary appointments or relatively new to their posts. Senior leaders have provided good support to subject leaders to help them understand the requirements of their posts. This has included modelling data analysis and training on holding 'challenging conversations' with staff to improve their practice. The experience and insight of middle leaders are variable and the practice of them routinely holding members of their departments to account is underdeveloped.

The academy's leaders hold extensive data about students' performance and these are shared with teachers so that they can plan appropriately to take students to the next stage in their learning. The presentation of data needs to be reconsidered so that it clearly shows student progress against academy targets as well as national benchmarks.

A management system has been introduced that enables teachers to review their own performance, identify needs and access training; this links with the recently-introduced appraisal policy. Governors now have the tools and skills available to them to make informed decisions about teachers' pay progression; this has previously been lacking. Two relatively new governors, whose professional experience is in educational leadership, are particularly helpful in challenging the work of senior leaders and supporting necessary developments in mathematics. More needs to be done to evaluate the impact of the academy's pupil premium funding (additional government money). Governors know how the money is spent, but have not yet evaluated its impact.

Leaders have evaluated the academy's performance objectively and engage in thorough, scheduled quality assurance activities that mean no weaknesses are unknown. Senior leaders have an accurate view of teachers' strengths and weaknesses and are taking robust action to challenge underperformance; they recognise the need to give all middle leaders the skills and confidence to do this.

External support

The academy has entered a new partnership with an outstanding Teaching School which is scheduled to provide support for sixth form development and mathematics teaching from February 2015. The academy brokers support with independent consultants to assist in the delivery, monitoring and evaluation of its improvement plan. An academy improvement partner continues to quality assure many aspects of the academy's work. The improvement partner's analysis of the academy's progress and priorities is accurate and middle leaders spoke highly of his impact on their practice.