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Mrs Karen Squire
Headteacher
Don Valley Academy and Performing Arts College
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South Yorkshire
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Dear Mrs Squire

Special measures monitoring inspection of Don Valley Academy and Performing Arts College

Following my visit to your academy on 28 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 in November 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the Principal and other senior leaders, the Chair of the Education Advisory Board and a representative of the sponsor, School Partnership Trust Academies. The sponsor's statement of action and the academy's improvement plans were evaluated. Information on the academy website, records of checks on the quality of teaching and information on the progress of newly qualified teachers were also scrutinised.

Context

Since the inspection, the Principal has re-structured senior leadership roles and responsibilities. Three teachers left the academy at the end of December 2014.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The Principal has a clear understanding of the issues that led to a decline in standards, the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of leadership and management. Having made her expectations clear to all staff, work is well underway to fully evaluate all aspects of the academy's provision and address weaknesses. The academy's improvement plan broadly reflects the areas for improvement and provides an effective means to hold people to account for progress against the success criteria. However, the plan requires minor modifications so that it sets out how the academy will better support the most able students to fulfil their potential. Training to improve the quality of teaching is underway and will continue in earnest across the spring and summer terms. Nevertheless, senior leaders are fully aware the quality of teaching across the academy needs to improve further.

In the past, inaccurate assessment of students' abilities meant the work provided for them was not always appropriate. Steps have been taken to tighten up on assessment practice and senior leaders now believe assessments are much more reliable. Current assessment data indicates rates of progress in some subjects, most notably in English, are improving. However, these improvements are inconsistent across other subjects.

Steps have been taken to ensure the academy's policy and procedure for managing the performance of teachers is more rigorous. As a result teachers are now held fully accountable for the progress students make. A new marking policy has been introduced and leaders have begun to check on the difference it is making. Broader checks on the quality of teaching are now on-going and unannounced, which is helping leaders to gain a more accurate picture of what teaching is typically like. As a result of these checks, a small number of teachers are receiving additional support. The academy has a thorough programme for the induction and support of newly qualified teachers; however, some departments lack the capacity to mentor newly qualified teachers adequately.

Work is underway to develop the leadership skills of middle leaders. The sponsor has arranged for an external consultant to work with middle leaders and develop their role in evaluating the quality of provision and holding colleagues to account. A programme of departmental reviews has begun and will continue across the spring and summer terms. Senior leaders recognise that middle leaders need to be increasingly effective in driving improvement, if the academy is to make the necessary progress.

Some changes have been made to the curriculum and to the setting of students. More changes are planned from September 2015. For example, more time will be allocated to English and mathematics, geography will be re-introduced to Key Stage 3 and there will be better provision for personal, social and health education.

The sponsor has been able to draw upon more resources and has increased the level of support it provides to the academy. Currently, this support is focused on improving students' progress in English and mathematics and the development of middle leadership. There are also plans for representatives of School Partnership Trust Academies to review the quality of special educational needs and the sixth form.

The external review of governance will take place next week. The academy has already reviewed its use of the pupil premium and is taking steps to ensure funding is targeted specifically on helping disadvantaged students make better progress. The Chair of the Education Advisory Board has established a core improvement group which will meet regularly and monitor the impact of the academy's work to raise achievement and improve the quality of teaching. The governors have also planned a programme of link visits so that they can better understand the impact planned actions are having. However, not all governors are confident to use performance data and, consequently, they are less able to challenge the Principal and other leaders effectively.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers after consultation with the lead HMI.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Education Advisory Board and the Director of Children's Services for Doncaster. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector