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Mrs Colette Macklin
Headteacher
Waterhead Academy
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Dear Mrs Macklin

Special measures monitoring inspection of Waterhead Academy

Following my visit to the academy on 11 February 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.

This visit 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, I met with you and also held separate meetings with the senior leaders responsible for students' attainment and progress, the quality of teaching and students' attendance and behaviour. I met with a group of thoughtful and articulate Key Stage 4 students who readily shared with me their ideas about the academy. During this meeting, the students also showed me the work in their English and mathematics books. This enabled me to look at the impact of teachers' marking on students' progress. I met a representative of the academy's sponsor and three members of the governing body. I examined the minutes of governing body meetings, held since the most recent inspection and the academy's up-to-date behaviour log and attendance data. I scrutinised some attainment and progress data for students in Key Stage 4 and examples of documentation used by senior leaders when they monitor the quality of teaching and learning. The sponsor's statement of action and the academy's post-Ofsted action plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the previous inspection there have been a number of staff changes. Two vice-Principals joined the senior leadership team at the start of the spring term. The academic director in post at the time of the inspection has since left the academy and been seconded to the staff of another school. The academy sponsor has commissioned the services of a national leader of governance to review the work of the governing body, including how governors target the extra funding the academy receives through the pupil premium. However, the review report has yet to be published. The academy sponsor is also in the process of engaging the services of an external educational professional to act in the role of Academy Improvement Partner to work with you and your colleagues to deliver the priorities in the academy's post-Ofsted action plan. The academy has been awarded funding to help support improvements in the science department. Governors have secured the services of two consultants to work with staff in the mathematics and modern languages departments to promote improvements in these two areas of the curriculum.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

There is general agreement among all stakeholders that the inspectors' judgements at the most recent inspection were justified. The identified areas for improvement, as written in the report, providing a firm foundation on which senior leaders can build an improving academy.

Senior leaders have introduced much greater rigour to the monitoring of students' progress and the mechanisms used to hold teachers to account for students' outcomes. Students are now set challenging targets, in each of their subjects, based on their attainment at the end of Key Stage 2. Consequently, this has raised teachers' and students' expectations of what can be achieved by the end of Key Stage 4. Senior leaders collect data on students' progress against these targets every half term. This is enabling senior and subject leaders to keep a close eye on students' progress and put in place appropriate help and support for those students who are identified as underachieving, in order to help them get back on track. The academy's current data are indicating that these strategies are already having a positive impact at Key Stage 4. Currently, the data are suggesting that the proportion of students in Year 11 who are achieving five higher grade GCSEs including English and mathematics is 10 percentage points higher than it was in the end of Year 11 national tests last year.

You and your colleagues are addressing governors' concerns about the accuracy of teachers' assessments in the past. The reliability of the data is now being increasingly assured by teachers within the academy checking each other's

judgements on students' attainment and progress. In addition, you have also used expertise beyond the academy to assure teachers' assessments in modern languages and science. These checks and balances are enabling senior leaders and governors to have greater confidence in the reliability of the achievement information they receive from subject departments. It is also enabling governors to carefully monitor students' progress and determine the impact of the actions taken by senior leaders to improve students' results. However, you and your colleagues are under no illusions that additional work needs to be done to assure further, the reliability and validity of teacher assessment across the academy and, in particular, at Key Stage 3.

Senior leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is much more robust than was the case prior to the inspection. Governors have recently secured the appointment of two assistant Principals, one with responsibility for improving teaching quality and the other with responsibility for teaching and learning. Both these new members of staff are charged with driving forward improvements in the quality of classroom practice. Teachers are regularly observed teaching. Evidence from these observations alongside evidence gleaned from the scrutiny of students' work and data on students' performance is enabling senior leaders to identify the best classroom practitioners and those teachers who are in need of help to bring their teaching up to the standard of the best. The governors' commitment to this aspect of the academy's work is evident in the time and additional personnel they have directed towards improving weaker teachers' professional practice. This includes assigning teachers in need of support a professional coach and giving them time during the academy week to undertake extra training. Although this strategy has only been in place for a relatively short time, the senior leader with responsibility for teaching and learning presented evidence to me that this strategy is already having a positive impact on the performance of some teachers.

In response to concerns raised in the November inspection report about teachers' marking of students' work, senior leaders have evaluated the quality of marking across the academy and identified strengths and weaknesses in this aspect of teachers' work. In the small sample of books that I examined during my meeting with students, there was evidence that students' work was being effectively and regularly marked in English. Students are being given information about the strengths of a piece of work and also what they need to do to make it even better, which students then act on. As a consequence, marking in English is beginning to have a positive impact on students' progress. However, senior leaders recognise that inconsistencies in the quality of marking remain and that work still needs to be done to establish consistently good marking in all subjects.

Senior leaders acknowledge that in the past there was a lack of clarity around individual teacher's responsibility for students' behaviour both in the classroom and around the academy. Consequently, when students exhibited challenging behaviours

teachers immediately referred these students to senior staff, absolving themselves of their professional obligation to help maintain good order and create an atmosphere conducive to learning. You and your colleagues have tackled this area for improvement vigorously and the staff, students and governors I spoke with felt that behaviour in and around the academy is now much calmer, with students responding positively to the academy's revised code of conduct and new ways of working. For example, you have restructured the timetable so that students have fewer but slightly longer lessons. As a result, effective learning time has been extended and students spend less time moving around the academy, which in the past has led to unruly behaviour on corridors.

As was the case at the previous inspection, students' attendance is still causing you and your colleagues concern. Senior leaders recognise that disadvantaged students and students with special educational needs are over-represented in the absence figures. The academy has renewed its partnership with Oldham's educational welfare service in order to provide support and help to those families whose children find coming to the academy challenging. Governors have plans to supplement this aspect of the academy's work by appointing a home-academy liaison officer with the intention of improving communication with parents. The recently appointed special educational needs coordinator is reviewing the provision for students with special educational needs in order to determine if the subjects they are given to study are meeting their needs and aspirations and motivating them to come to the academy. However, many of these initiatives have only recently been introduced and it is too early to assess their impact. Nevertheless, it is timely that you are leading a wholesale review of the curriculum to determine if its breadth and balance are providing all students with opportunities to undertake a range of motivating and exciting learning experiences.

You and your colleagues' resolve to improve the academy and move it rapidly out of special measures is palpable. Your determination is shared by the academy's sponsor and governing body and you have united them behind your drive to improve the academy and make it an effective place of learning.

The sponsor's statement of action is a detailed document, written in response to the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Targets for improvement are described as are the termly progress measures by which the sponsor will measure the plans' success. However, the statement of action is not a stand-alone document and the detail of the actions to be taken, by academy staff, to achieve each of the targets in it is encapsulated in the academy's post-Ofsted action plan. In this plan, senior leaders have carefully sequenced the programme of actions to be taken to improve the academy so that they are not attempting to tackle all the areas for improvement at the same time. As a consequence, the plan makes clear what senior leaders consider to be the most important priorities and should be

attempted first in order to maximise the plan's impact. However, although the combined sponsor's statement of action and the academy's post-Ofsted action plan are providing an effective blueprint to improve the academy, both could be sharper. For example, in the sponsor's statement of action arrangements for informing registered parents of proposed actions as well as ascertaining and taking their views into account need clarifying. Further, in the academy's post-Ofsted action plan the proposed timescales for some of the actions are not tight enough. Although these actions have definite start dates, the dates by which some of these actions should be completed are not specified. Consequently, this presents a difficulty to governors when they attempt to evaluate the success or otherwise of particular improvement activities. Nevertheless, having considered both the sponsor's statement of action and the academy's post-Ofsted action plan I am able to make the following judgements:

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

The academy's post-Ofsted action plan is fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Oldham and the Department for Education's Academies Advisers Unit. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry
Her Majesty's Inspector