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Mrs Jeanette Saw
Headteacher
Audenshaw School Academy Trust
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Manchester
Lancashire
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Dear Mrs Saw

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Audenshaw School Academy Trust

Following my visit to your school on 9 March 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in October 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you and your senior colleagues. During this meeting you gave me an update on the changes to the school since the most recent inspection and the progress you are making against each of the areas for improvement described in the previous inspection report. I also met with two governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and the curriculum leaders for mathematics, science and the sixth form. I met with a group of Year 10 students who shared with me their opinions about the school and together, we looked at the work in their mathematics books. I took the opportunity to speak with the three students who accompanied me on a tour of the school. I evaluated the governing body's statement of action and the school's improvement plan.

Context

Since the previous inspection three teachers have left the school as have three members of the support team. Four teachers have joined the staff. Of these four

teachers three are associated with core subject departments, one as second in charge in English, one as second in charge in mathematics and one teacher is a member of the science department.

As a result of a recent round of recruitment, two mathematics teachers have been appointed to commence duty at Audenshaw in September.

At the end of the summer term, three temporary teachers of mathematics and three temporary teachers of modern foreign languages will be leaving the school.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Senior leaders report that they are bringing much needed stability to the teaching team, reducing their reliance on temporary staff to help deliver the curriculum. As a result, their records indicate that the quality of teaching is improving and, as a consequence, their projections for students' results at the end of Key Stage 4 are an improvement on those achieved last year. Senior leaders predict that in 2015 there will be a 14 percentage point increase on the proportion of students leaving Key Stage 4 with five higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics and the proportions of students making at least expected progress in these two subjects, will be above the 2014 national averages.

Senior and middle leaders agree that they have introduced much greater rigour to the monitoring of students' progress. Teachers' assessments of students' performance, in a range of subjects, have been subject to scrutiny from subject specialists in other schools. As a result, you and your colleagues are confident that the data on students' performance are reliable. Further, the half-termly checks on students' progress is enabling subject leaders to identify quickly those students who are underachieving and put in place extra help to get them back on track. This extra help includes before- and after-school revision classes and the recently introduced Saturday morning school. You firmly believe that these interventions are having a positive impact on students' progress, particularly in Year 11 and the senior leader with responsibility for achievement presented data that supported this view. Much of the additional help and support is being directed at students in Year 11. Senior leaders have taken the pragmatic view that this will boost results at GCSE, making up for weaker teaching that was a result of staff turbulence in the past.

Senior leaders have invested in two on-line resources for use by students. The first of these is the 'GCSE hub' and the second 'Show my homework'. Both of these internet applications provide students with computer-based materials to help them continue their studies out of school. Those students I met with during my visit said how much they valued these readily available resources. However, these are relatively new initiatives and it is too early to assess their impact.

Middle leaders have greater responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching in their departments than was the case prior to the inspection. Consequently, they are now more actively involved in promoting improvements in

the quality of teaching and learning. The middle leaders I met said that they have received training to make judgements on the quality of teaching and use a range of evidence including observing their colleagues' classroom practice, scrutinising the work in students' books and students' progress data to determine the quality of teaching over time. As a result, they have been able to identify those of their colleagues whose teaching is of consistently high quality and put in place support for those whose professional performance requires further improvement. Middle leaders were of the opinion that, as a result of this strategy, the quality of teaching in their departments is improving, but accept that further work needs to be done to bring all teaching up to the standard of the best.

The senior leader with responsibility for the sixth form indicated that, as with the rest of the school, the decline in achievement over time was attributable to turbulence in staffing. However, the school states that this has now been addressed and teaching vacancies filled. As a result, the school reports that the quality of provision for students at Key Stage 5 is improving.

Sixth form students are set targets based on their end of Key Stage 4 attainment and the head of sixth form monitors their progress against these targets every half term. The school reports that this focused monitoring is having a positive impact on students' performance with current data indicating a 10 percentage point increase in the proportion of students, at advanced level, achieving at the higher A* to B grade boundary compared to the final figure for 2014.

Those students that I spoke with during my visit were of the opinion that the school is improving. As one student said, 'since the inspection this school has been on the up.' They say that staffing is more settled, they have fewer temporary teachers and as a result the quality of teaching is getting better and students' classroom behaviour improving. A number of students expressed the opinion that they were facing more challenging work in lessons and teachers' expectations of them are now higher. The sample of mathematics books that I scrutinised, with students, show that teachers' marking is compliant with school policy. Further, there are examples of effective marking, where teachers have identified students' misunderstanding and given them useful advice to move their learning on. However, students said that inconsistencies in the quality of marking remain, with differences in the standard of marking between some teaching groups and across some subjects.

The school presents as a calm, orderly and purposeful place of learning. Students treat their environment with respect. This is evident in the school site that is clean, tidy and litter and graffiti free.

The governors have brokered the support of staff from a national support school, including the headteacher, who is a National Leader of Education. The intention being that these colleagues will help senior leaders at Audenshaw raise standards and address, quickly, those areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Governors are supporting you and your colleagues in your work to improve the school. They have a secure understanding of the work that the staff are undertaking to improve the school. Half-termly meetings of the governors' standards committee are enabling them to keep a close eye on the school's development and hold you to account for the progress being made against each of the priorities in the school improvement plan. However, the governors' statement of action which should provide specific information about the action they will take in the light of the inspection, including the period within which these proposed actions are planned, is not sharp enough. Further, arrangements for informing parents of governors' proposed actions as well as taking parents' views into account are incomplete.

The school improvement plan is a detailed document. It provides an overview of the school's values, aims, mission and vision, which underpin the proposed actions to improve the school. Achievement targets for 2015 are presented as headline figures for attainment and progress at the end of Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. However, these could be further refined to include the achievement targets for the key groups in the school. This will enable senior leaders and governors to determine if expectations for all groups of students are high enough. Senior leader responsibilities are plainly identified and, as a result, lines of accountability are clearly defined. Although the plan covers each of the areas for improvement in the most recent inspection report, these are not explicitly identified. Nevertheless, the plan provides an effective road map for senior leaders to follow on the school's journey to good overall effectiveness.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose

The governors' statement of action is not fit for purpose

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Executive Director for Tameside and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry
Her Majesty's Inspector