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17 April 2015

Zoe House
Lees Brook Community School
Morley Road
Chaddesden
Derby
DE21 4QX

Dear Ms House

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Lees Brook Community School

Following my visit to your academy on 16 April 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

The academy should take immediate action to:

- ensure all leaders and managers understand clearly the academy's priorities for improvement, and revise their own development plans, so that actions to improve the academy are consistently implemented, with their impact closely and regularly evaluated
- ensure training for teachers focuses closely on the areas identified in the development plan, such as teaching more-able students effectively
- strengthen the role of governors in evaluating the impact of the improvement plan.

Evidence

During the inspection I met with the acting headteacher, senior and subject leaders and the Chair of the Governing Body. I undertook short visits to lessons,

accompanied by the acting headteacher and looked at the work in students' books. A range of documentation was considered, including: the academy's action plan and self-evaluation; department action plans; information on the achievement of students; information on how leaders track students' achievement; minutes of the governing body, and records relating to observations of teaching. I spoke by telephone to the academy's improvement partner, and looked at the results of a recent staff survey.

Context

Since the previous inspection the headteacher has resigned. Governors have appointed an acting headteacher, who was previously the deputy headteacher. They have restructured the senior leadership team, and have appointed a deputy headteacher, and acting deputy headteacher. The director of learning for science has stepped down, and the director of learning for languages has resigned. Replacements have not yet been made for these posts.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, instabilities in leadership and staffing have stalled the progress the academy was able to make. Leaders did not address with sufficient urgency the areas of the school that were most in need of improvement, and as a result, the rate of improvement has been too slow. Since the appointment of the acting headteacher and the restructuring of the leadership team, progress has been much more rapid. Current leaders have acted quickly to draw up an action plan that identifies the areas for improvement set out in the inspection report. The proposed actions reflect the urgency needed to bring about improvements quickly. However, these have not been fully shared with staff, so that not all leaders are clear of their role in holding teachers to account and securing improvement. It is not always clear how the impact of actions will be evaluated, or by whom, since the plan does not clearly identify opportunities for the governing body to check how well the academy is doing.

Self-evaluation of the school's performance was previously inaccurate, resulting in a slower rate of improvement across the school. Current leaders have responded positively to the findings of the Ofsted report and have laid the foundations for improving the academy. They have an accurate view of the academy's strengths and weakness and are fully committed to bringing about the necessary improvements to raise the achievement of students. For example, they have ensured that all leaders make good use of the academy's systems to track students' progress. This is resulting in swifter intervention for students at risk of falling behind, and better achievement for students currently in school. More students are now on track to make the expected progress in English, resulting in an increased proportion of students who are set to achieve five A*-C grades including English and mathematics. Achievement in science, humanities and languages is likewise improving, although there is further scope to ensure that a greater proportion of the more-able students

achieve the top grades they are capable of. Important changes have been made to the curriculum, so that it better meets the needs of students.

Leaders have drawn up plans to improve the quality of teaching across the school to ensure that it is consistently good. They have drafted a set of 'non-negotiables' so that all teachers know what is expected of them. Learning walks focus on the national teachers' standards and on the elements of good teaching, but do not link clearly enough to the priorities identified in the action plan. Leaders have introduced training opportunities for teachers to share good practice and learn from the best practice in the school. However, it is not clear how leaders will monitor and evaluate the impact of these sessions to ensure that teaching improves.

Not all subject leaders are clear about their role in driving improvement, and their development plans do not link closely enough to the whole school priorities. Plans do not all contain measurable milestones for success, or articulate clearly enough how the quality of teaching will improve in their areas. Some are still too optimistic in their evaluations of teaching.

The academy's action plan identifies clearly how the progress of more-able students will be monitored, and teachers are aware that this is a priority for improvement. However, they have not received clear guidance on teaching the most able, and are not consistently ensuring that work is sufficiently challenging for these students.

Scrutiny of students work shows that marking is not used consistently well across all subjects. While some teachers precisely identify the follow-up actions that students are required to do, others do not, or do not ensure that their advice is acted on by students.

The new leadership structure is ensuring that behaviour incidents are dealt with more effectively, and that leaders have a clearer understanding of where and when incidents are more likely to occur. Staff have appreciated this new approach and value the support they receive from senior leaders in managing students' behaviour. Teachers ensure that lessons get off to a quicker start to minimise the likelihood of incidents occurring. Not all of them ensure that students' concentration and engagement are maintained through exciting, challenging lessons.

Subject leaders have identified how their subject contributes to the development of students' literacy, for example through the use of key words. In some cases, teachers accept too little work from students who are capable of doing better and do not challenge students to write at length and in depth in their subjects. Students have not been able to choose and read books for themselves, because of the delay in opening the new library. However, leaders are now approaching this task with vigour, and have organised fundraising activities in the local community to speed up the progress of this project. Students are responding positively to this and to other initiatives to increase their involvement in the community.

Leaders are working effectively to improve communication with staff, students and with parents. They now ensure that any concerns and complaints are responded to swiftly and are developing a culture of trust and openness. As one teacher commented: 'The last few weeks have been a breath of fresh air, staff are smiling again and morale has gone up.' A recent survey showed that the overwhelming majority of staff are proud to work at this school and know what the school is trying to achieve. Students, too, feel listened to and valued. They have appreciated opportunities to air their views about what is working well and what needs further improvement, and welcome the greater range of extra-curricular activities on offer.

Governors recognise that they have not in the past held leaders stringently to account for the achievement of students and the quality of teaching, and have relied too heavily on information provided by leaders. Since the inspection, they have undergone training and now have a better understanding of how to fully support and challenge academy leaders. They now ask more challenging questions of leaders, and meet regularly with subject leaders to check progress against the rapid improvement plans in place for key departments. The Chair of the Governing Body has been a visible presence in school and has made herself available for staff to approach with any concerns they have. Governors are fully committed to driving the further improvement of the school and have not shied away from making difficult decisions where necessary to do so. They have arranged for a review of governance to be carried out, although this had not taken place at the time of the inspection.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority has provided effective support to the acting headteacher, and to senior and subject leaders. It has brokered a package of support from a local teaching school alliance that will further increase the academy's capacity to improve.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Derby local authority name and as below.

Yours sincerely

Deirdre Duignan
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Derby Local authority
- hns.efa@education.gsi.gov.uk
- For academies [CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk]