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23 April 2015

Mrs Yvonne Buckley
Headteacher
Willow Academy
Alston Road
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN4 7EZ

Dear Mrs Buckley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Willow Academy, Doncaster

Following my visit to your academy on 22 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy 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, governors and the Wakefield City Academies Trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- Improve leaders and teachers understanding of effective teaching and learning
- review the current improvement plan to provide fewer and clearer priorities whilst sharpening measures by which the impact of actions can be checked more effectively
- ensure the roles and responsibilities within the governance arrangements for the academy are clarified and understood clearly by all those concerned so that lines of accountability are clear.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, a group of pupils, governors and representatives of the Wakefield City Academies Trust. I evaluated a range of documentation including the school improvement plan. In addition, I undertook a tour of the school, visiting classrooms and speaking with pupils

Main findings

Since being removed from Special Measures at the last inspection, the headteacher and senior leaders have undertaken well-targeted actions which are beginning to make a difference, most notably in the behaviour of pupils in and around the school. The academy has a calm and purposeful atmosphere. All staff place an emphasis on promoting positive behaviours in lessons and on the playground. The academy has reviewed the behaviour policy, implemented changes to playground routines and monitored the implementation of these changes closely. The behaviour observed in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 lessons show that pupils are engaging well with their work and can work well together. In these lessons there were few instances of low level disruptive behaviour and pupils were engaged with their tasks. Pupils stated that lessons are improving and they can concentrate better.

The academy has continued to build on the improvements seen before the last inspection. For example, senior leaders and middle leaders have a more accurate view of the standards pupils are achieving. This is because new systems are now in place to regularly secure the accuracy of teachers' assessments. They are working with good and outstanding schools within the partnership to ensure that assessments are accurate. Systems are now in place to track pupils' progress and provide detailed information about groups of pupils vulnerable to underachieving. As a result, teachers identify and intervene with individuals and groups of pupils who need additional support. Teachers' planning is now informed by on-going assessments in a more timely fashion. There are regular reviews of how well pupils are achieving and staff are held more directly to account for the progress all their pupils are making. Challenge and support is being provided where teachers' performance needs improvement. Pupils report they get frequent opportunities to act on teachers' comments and feel well supported in their learning. Work in pupils' books shows teachers' guidance on how pupils can improve their work is not consistent. Initiating and implementing policies and monitoring the impact of procedures have been a key focus. Academy leaders have not established shared expectations about what good and outstanding teaching and learning looks like. However, links with good and outstanding schools are now in place with a series of visits for teachers to learn from and identify best practice.

Middle and senior leaders are increasingly working directly with, and developing the working practices of teachers. Their roles and responsibilities have been redefined and clarified. New appointments have been made to build capacity including a designated Early Years leader. Work to support senior and middle leaders has

focussed on developing knowledge about their area of responsibility. Their ability to monitor and challenge inconsistent practice where necessary is not securely established.

The school improvement plan lacks clarity. It addresses all of the areas identified in the recent inspection, however it is overly extensive and as a consequence it is not clear what the key priorities are. In addition, the intended outcomes of the plan lack sufficient detail about what improvements in teaching may be expected. There is a lack of detail about expected and better than expected progress pupils will make including those that need to catch up. This means that governors cannot always track precisely how well the academy is improving over time.

The Local Governing Body has recently been established. It has held several meetings to discuss the needs of the academy. Governors have an increasing presence in the academy and as a result have a good understanding of the challenges the academy faces. There is a lack of clarity of the roles and responsibilities within the governance arrangements. For example, how the performance of the headteacher will be monitored and managed is unclear.

External support

Wakefield City Academy Trust has been instrumental in supporting the recent improvements in the academy. They know the academy well and have drawn on capacity within the Trust to have a regular presence in classrooms and move the academy forward. They have co-ordinated the support for the academy sharing good and outstanding practice including the introduction of new assessment systems, recruitment of new staff and support for individual teachers.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Local Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Doncaster and as below.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Brown

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- hns.efa@education.gsi.gov.uk
- For academies [CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk]