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Mrs Karen Squire
Headteacher
Don Valley Academy and Performing Arts College
Jossey Lane
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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 with Mary Lanovy-Taylor and Andrew Swallow, additional inspectors, to your academy on 28 and 29 April 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 previous monitoring inspection. Thank you for allowing my colleague, Susan Hayter, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to accompany me.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2014

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching to be at least good or better throughout the academy so that students' progress accelerates not only in English and mathematics but also in all other subjects, by ensuring that:
 - teachers use the information about students' capabilities to plan well-targeted activities that meet their individual needs and sets them appropriate challenges, especially the most able
 - students' independence and self-reliance are developed so that they do not wait for teachers to provide help and advice
 - marking is done regularly, is of good quality, clearly understood by students and acted upon appropriately
 - teachers do not accept poorly presented and unfinished work
 - any inappropriate attitudes shown by students during and between lessons are challenged systematically and regularly
 - teaching assistants' skills are used effectively in lessons.

- Raise attainment in all subjects, including in the sixth form, ensuring that students of all different abilities make rapid and sustained progress.

- Embed securely the new systems and policies recently implemented so that leaders and managers at all levels take responsibility for bringing about improvements by:
 - making sure the monitoring of teaching is done regularly and evaluated appropriately so suitable support and challenge can be provided
 - using the findings of the academy's monitoring to set clear targets to be achieved so that initiatives can be checked to measure their impact on student progress
 - ensuring that students in all year groups understand the fundamentals of British values
 - holding middle leaders to account for the progress students make in their subjects and ensure that in turn middle leaders hold their staff to account
 - monitoring carefully students' attendance in the sixth-form.

- Ensure that governors access available training so that they are better able to use information about students to hold leaders and teachers to account for the standards in their areas of responsibility.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 April 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal and other senior leaders, a group of middle leaders, the head of sixth form, the Chair of the Education Advisory Board and a representative of the sponsor, School Partnership Trust Academies. Twenty-nine part-lessons were observed, of which most were observed jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also scrutinised a sample of students' English and mathematics books.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection a new subject leader for mathematics has been appointed. Two new mathematics teachers have been recruited and will take up post in September. A new member of the Education Advisory Board has been appointed.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

The reliability of assessments is improving. Each department has reviewed its assessment practice and has put an assessment plan in place. There is a greater focus on the use of standardised assessments in all subjects. As a result, assessment information gathered across the year is becoming more secure.

The academy's own data suggest examination results in 2015 will be better than last year. Current data suggest 55% of students will attain five or more A* to C grades at GCSE level, including English and mathematics, which would be in line with the national average. Some of this improvement is due to the academy providing significant levels of additional support for students in Year 11. Revision classes are running after lessons finish most days and some students are being withdrawn from other lessons to receive additional teaching for English and mathematics. Some groups of students, such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have received well-planned additional support which has proved very successful, particularly in mathematics. These additional opportunities are helping students in Year 11 to address gaps in their knowledge and prepare more effectively for forthcoming examinations.

The attainment of disadvantaged students in Year 11 is predicted to rise in 2015 in both English and mathematics. Gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged students and other students in the academy are predicted to narrow more in mathematics than in English.

In Key Stage 3, the academy's own data suggest more students have begun to make better progress in English and mathematics, although these improvements are inconsistent. Currently, girls are making better progress than boys. In English, the

most able students are not making the progress they should. More work needs to be done to ensure that teaching fully stretches and challenges those students in top sets. Subject leaders have begun to review the curriculum offered, so that there are regular opportunities for the most able students to work independently, undertake research and solve complex problems.

The quality of teaching

Although senior leaders have set out their expectations and provided training on key aspects of teaching, improvements are at an early stage and the quality of teaching remains very variable. Some teachers' expectations of what students can do remain too low. They provide work which is too easy for some students and are too accepting of untidy, unfinished and poorly presented work. Some teachers do not manage the behaviour of students with sufficient authority, and fail to establish an appropriate climate for learning. Teachers have access to information on students' prior attainment, but some do not use it effectively to plan work which helps students take the next steps in their learning. Too many lessons are planned to keep students busy, rather than focusing on helping them to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding.

A key focus for senior leaders has been to ensure that marking of books leads to more effective learning. This is beginning to happen, as most teachers now adhere to the academy's marking policy. There is some highly effective marking, which is appreciated by students, although a few teachers still do not mark regularly enough and have not developed effective routines for students to respond to the comments made and improve their work. Senior leaders now need to share the good practice that exists more widely so that the quality of marking becomes more consistent and sustainable.

Inspectors saw some effective support from teaching assistants. In mathematics, for example, a teaching assistant worked with different groups of students and asked thought-provoking and challenging questions that helped students to develop their understanding of trigonometry.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Senior leaders have rightly identified the need to improve students' attitudes to learning. This is because some students do not take sufficient pride in their work or show enough respect or tolerance for one another. When lessons are not sufficiently challenging or fail to engage students, some drift off task, do not abide by the academy's code of conduct and disrupt learning. Senior leaders recognise that more needs to be done by all members of staff to help students develop positive learning behaviour. A senior leader has been deployed to focus on this area for improvement. As a first step, senior leaders have recently introduced a 'consequences room' to which disruptive students are removed. The use of this facility is being monitored

closely by senior leaders. Students told inspectors the introduction of the 'consequences room' is a positive development.

Students' attendance so far this academic year has improved on that seen in 2013 to 14 and is similar to the national average. The proportion of students that are regularly absent from the academy has fallen, because of the tenacious work done by the attendance team.

The number of students excluded from the academy so far this year is lower than at the same point last year. There are good systems in place to manage students at risk of exclusion.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Following the last monitoring inspection, the Principal has amended the academy's improvement plan so that it includes specific actions to improve the achievement of more able students. More recently, leaders have added further actions to the plan to address the disruptive behaviour of some students. Leaders are systematically checking that planned actions are being delivered. Since the last inspection, leaders have made more progress in raising attainment and improving governance than in improving the quality of teaching.

The external review of governance has been completed and the Education Advisory Board has produced its own action plan to address the recommendations. The core improvement group has continued to meet each month. While members of the group are becoming increasingly skilled in using progress data to hold leaders accountable, they have received less information about the impact of work done to improve the quality of teaching. In addition, members of the Education Advisory Board have not routinely made visits to observe lessons or students' behaviour and attitudes to learning. They now plan for members of the Education Advisory Board to visit the academy more regularly to gain better first-hand knowledge of the progress the academy is making.

Senior and middle leaders continue to make widespread checks on the quality of teaching and have more information on current strengths and weaknesses. However, during this monitoring visit, leaders who visited lessons with inspectors were disappointed with the progress students made and with the quality of work in students' books. This is because leaders' checks have focused too much on what teachers are doing and have not looked enough at students' learning and progress. Adjustments need to be made so that leaders gain a more accurate picture from which to provide future training for staff.

Subject leaders are beginning to take more ownership of their subject areas. They have begun to use data on students' progress more effectively and are responding more proactively to the weaker areas of performance they identify. All are focusing

strongly on providing additional support for Year 11 students in the run-up to GCSE examinations. Subject leaders now make more regular checks on students' books and visit lessons within their departments more regularly. However, they need to do more to ensure that all teachers are less accepting of poorly presented and untidy work and that lessons are planned to ensure that students consistently make gains in knowledge, skills and understanding.

External support

The sponsor of the academy, School Partnership Trust Academies, continues to provide support for key areas of development. Regular meetings are held with senior leaders to hold them fully accountable for the academy's progress and external consultants continue to provide ongoing training and development for subject leaders. The Principal is able to draw upon further support from partner schools to support developments as they emerge.

Priority for further improvement

- Take urgent action to improve the attitudes of students by making clear what learning behaviour the academy expects, and ensuring that teachers reinforce this behaviour consistently.