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Mr John Patino
Headteacher
The Discovery Academy
Discovery Drive
Stoke-on-Trent
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Dear Mr Patino

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of The Discovery Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 29 April 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 academy's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses in January 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the Principal, senior leaders, students and the vice-Chair of the Governing Body who is also a representative of the sponsor. Short visits to a small number of lessons were undertaken. The sponsor's statement of action and the academy improvement plan were evaluated. Recent tracking data, an externally commissioned pupil premium review and impact statements produced by senior leaders were also reviewed.

Context

Since the last inspection a new leadership team is in place in the mathematics department.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The sponsor's statement of action and the academy action plan have been produced as a single document. Senior leaders and governors were keen to instil a sense of urgency following the inspection and ensure that action was taken quickly and decisively. As a result, the great majority of planned actions take place in a short period immediately following the inspection. There is little information in the plan on what specific actions will be taken in the next academic year. This needs to be addressed by the sponsor, the governing body and senior leaders as a matter of urgency to ensure that actions are distributed evenly through next year and all priorities are addressed fully.

The statement of action suggests that the improvement plan will be shared with parents on the academy website. However, it is difficult to find and does not give parents an opportunity to comment on the priorities.

The Principal and senior leaders have made good use of the outcomes of the inspection to set out a secure strategy for improvement. Key actions are focused on improving achievement (particularly in mathematics and for disadvantaged students), improving teaching and learning and improving attendance and behaviour. As a result of sharply targeted interventions, some improvements are already evident. For example, there has been an improvement in attendance in the spring term and the proportion of teaching that is inadequate or requires improvement is reducing. However, planned actions are still overwhelmingly focused on catch-up activities for existing Year 11 students. Senior leaders understand that they now need to focus the plan on getting things right first time for all students and reduce the reliance on intervention in Year 11.

Governors are working closely with senior leaders to monitor the effectiveness of improvement activity. Governors meet fortnightly with the staff responsible for delivering the action plan through the Governors' Executive Board. At these meetings governors ask senior leaders challenging questions about their work. Success criteria have been identified for each of the key priorities in the improvement plan. However, these criteria are not always easily measurable and this makes it harder for governors to track and monitor the impact of improvement activities.

Academy leaders are keen to ensure that there is external validation of their work. An external review of the pupil premium (additional government money) has already been carried out and staff are beginning to implement the recommendations. A teaching and learning review is currently under way to check that the judgements of senior leaders are robust. Students' work in English and mathematics is moderated by teachers from other schools.

Governors have secured additional support for the school, including consultant support for mathematics, staff training and support from expert teachers from other schools.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgement was made:

The combined sponsor's statement of action and academy improvement plan is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Stoke-on-Trent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deborah James

Her Majesty's Inspector