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13 May 2015

Mrs Susan Cousin
Principal
Yewlands Academy
Creswick Lane
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S35 8NN

Dear Mrs S Cousin

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Yewlands Academy

Following my visit to your school with Lesley Butcher, Her Majesty's Inspector, on 12 May 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.

This visit was the third monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in March 2014. 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 the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Local Governing Body, the Interim Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families for Sheffield and the Department for Education Academies Advisers Unit.

Yours sincerely

Amraz Ali

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve teaching to good or better by:
 - raising the expectations of all teachers as to what all students, particularly the most able, can achieve
 - improving students' behaviour and attitudes to learning by making sure that students adhere to the school uniform code and come to all lessons expecting to work hard and quickly
 - using the information that teachers have about what students know and can do to provide them with work which helps them to learn more quickly in lessons and over time
 - ensuring that marking shows students how to improve their work and making sure that they respond to teachers' advice
 - making sure there is no inadequate teaching.

- Raise attainment by ensuring that all groups of students make good progress in all subjects by:
 - challenging the most able students in all lessons, so they are expected to think more deeply and to produce more work of a higher quality
 - increasing the rate of progress in mathematics by providing work which builds students' skills and allows them to use these skills for a range of different purposes
 - using the detailed information that the academy has to make sure that students eligible for the student premium make at least good progress in all year groups and in all subjects.

- Make sure that leaders and governors take the necessary steps to improve teaching and students' achievement by:
 - using the examples of good and outstanding teaching in the academy to help all teachers to recognise what the students can achieve and to improve the quality of teaching
 - making sure that subject leaders have the knowledge and skills to lead improvements in teaching and achievement in their subjects and that they are held to account for this
 - making sure that improvement plans are understood by all staff, to ensure the academy continues to improve and, in particular, to guide improvement in the quality of teaching and in students' achievement.

An external review of governance and of the academy's use of the student premium was recommended.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 12 May 2015

Evidence

The inspectors met with the Principal, four leaders, a group of students, the Chair of the Local Governing Body and a representative of the sponsor, Wakefield City Academy Trust (WCAT). The inspectors undertook a series of short visits to mathematics classes accompanied by two of the middle leaders. This included observing learning in lessons, talking to students about their work and scrutinising their exercise books. The main focus was to determine the extent of improvements in the teaching and leadership of mathematics that had taken place since the last monitoring inspection and the impact of leaders on closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students. The inspectors also looked closely at documentary evidence provided by the academy, which included minutes of the meetings of the local governing body, the academy's self-evaluation, information on the use of the pupil premium (additional government funding to support disadvantaged students) as well as data related to students' achievement.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, there have been some staffing changes. Three teachers left the school and two new teachers have been recruited.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The quality of leadership and management is continuing to improve. Students confirm that behaviour in classrooms and around the academy is getting better. A review of the academy's use of alternative provision has led to a reduction in the number of students who are educated off-site. Senior and middle leaders are continuing to develop their skills as a direct result of the support from WCAT. The training and support are helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning. In turn, this is helping to raise teachers' confidence and determination to improve. Consequently, attainment and progress are getting better.

The evaluation of teachers' effectiveness is considered 'in the round' so that the 'teacher-on-a-page' document for each teacher includes the evaluation of individual lessons, students' progress information and the outcomes of book scrutiny. Consequently, leaders have a more accurate view of the effectiveness of teachers and the support each one needs to improve. Termly student progress meetings ensure that the progress of students within every teaching group is reviewed. However, these reviews do not always explicitly consider the attainment and progress of disadvantaged students within each group. A positive development has been the way that unannounced visits to classrooms by senior leaders are used to provide 'quick' feedback. Findings are recorded on small carbonated feedback sheets, to record instantly strengths and things that might be better.

The inspectors' observations of teaching, undertaken with leaders, confirm the improving accuracy of leaders' evaluations and their ability to identify strengths and areas for further improvement. There is clear evidence that the quality of teaching is improving and leaders are aware of where further work is needed.

Support from the sponsor is helping to develop the leadership skills of heads of department. For example, the mathematics leader now has a clear view of the effectiveness of the department, including the quality of teaching and the impact of this on the achievement of students. The guidance and support provided to mathematics teachers are having a positive impact. Although the academy has made some clear progress, leaders are aware that there is more to be done to ensure that all teaching is as effective as it could be, particularly in challenging the most able and supporting the learning of disadvantaged students.

The improving leadership of teaching is helping to secure better attainment and progress. The academy's data confirm that progress is improving for almost all groups of students. However, lower-ability disadvantaged students do not always make as much progress as they could. Although the academy's own data show that the gap between disadvantaged students and other students is narrowing, it remains a significant issue for the academy.

There has been a skills audit of governors but the findings of this have not been reported or acted upon. Although there are plans to strengthen the governing body further, with the appointment of a governor from the Trust, the pace at which governance is improving is a concern. The Chair of the Local Governing Body reports that he knows much more work needs to be done if the governing body is to provide effective leadership, challenge and support.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- leaders have an accurate picture of the attainment and progress of students, including that of those who are disadvantaged. Assessment and tracking procedures are more robust
- training, guidance and support for teachers to aid their development have improved. For example, written feedback to teachers following formal lesson observations now better identifies the areas where improvement is needed
- the curriculum offer has been widened to provide greater opportunity for drama and art. Time is being used more effectively to increase the amount of curriculum time available for English and mathematics. There are more clubs available at lunchtime. Consequently, attendance continues to improve
- the review of use of the pupil premium funding and its effectiveness, undertaken with support from the sponsor, has identified which aspects are having the greatest and least impact. This is helping leaders to plan the use of resources better

- the academy's self-evaluation is more accurate and realistic. The involvement of governors and the sponsor in the drawing-up of departmental self-evaluations is helping to provide both support and challenge to leaders.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- although improving, there is still some variability in the quality of teaching and its impact on learning
- while improving, there remains some work to do in order to ensure that mathematics teaching is helping to close the gaps more rapidly in the attainment and progress of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students
- not all teachers are aware of, and actively doing something about, the progress and attainment of disadvantaged students; for example, this is not documented in all student progress discussions.

External support

The sponsor continues to provide valuable support to the academy. For example, support for the head of mathematics is helping to bring about improvements to the quality of teaching. Leaders continue to value the leadership of the Principal, a senior leader from WCAT and the involvement of other experienced leaders from within the trust and this is helping to secure better leadership.