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Mr Gareth Mason
Principal
De Lacy Academy
Middle Lane
Knottingley
Wakefield
WF11 0BZ

Dear Mr Mason

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to De Lacy Academy, Wakefield

Following my visit to your academy on 7 July 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 February 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the academy was also judged to require improvement.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior and middle leaders, the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors and a representative of the Academy Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA) to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I scrutinised academy documents and evaluated the academy's improvement plan. I visited classes with senior leaders, met with a group of students and examined the work in their books and folders.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection one teacher has joined the academy.

Main findings

Senior leaders fully accept that De Lacy Academy requires improvement and recognise that urgent action is needed to get the academy to good. There is a shared and determined drive for improvement and a strong commitment to tackle the weaknesses identified at the last section 5 inspection.

Systems to support improvement have been strengthened. Senior leaders are routinely checking teachers' work, for example, by observing students' learning in lessons, scrutinising their work in books and monitoring their progress towards targets. However, this work is not always precise enough to pin-point exactly where improvement is needed and the areas for improvement are not always tackled with the necessary urgency. Middle leaders have a stronger role and are already exerting greater influence on the quality of teaching across the academy. For example, middle leaders are 'pairing up' teachers to develop their practice in marking and giving feedback to students. Students say that this is helping them to make better progress because it tells them exactly what they need to do to improve their work.

Although the academy's improvement plan is closely linked to the areas for improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection, it does not include measurable step-by-step targets or clearly specify how and when progress towards these targets will be monitored and reviewed. For example, improving attendance and reducing persistent absence are identified as priorities, but the plan does not specify by how much or by when, neither does it identify the groups of students whose attendance needs to improve most quickly.

Governors are ambitious for the academy and have already taken steps to ensure that they are better informed. To further strengthen their role, governors need to demand better and more precise information about the implementation and impact of the academy's improvement plan so that they can keep a closer eye on whether improvement is swift enough.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- Strengthen the academy improvement plan so that it clearly identifies measurable step-by-step targets for improvement and specifies how and when progress towards these targets will be monitored and reviewed.

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

External support

The academy is building a network of support, drawing on practice in outstanding schools and academies across the region. There is a stronger role for the academy sponsor in checking the progress and impact of the academy's actions and providing more detailed evaluative information and greater challenge for senior leaders and governors. Greater urgency and intensity is needed so that the impact of external support on the academy's capacity for improvement is fully realised.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Wakefield.

Yours sincerely

Nick Whittaker
Her Majesty's Inspector