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Mr Mark Brown
Principal
Winifred Holtby Academy
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Dear Mr Brown

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Winifred Holtby Academy, City of Kingston upon Hull

Following my visit to your academy with Janet Lunn HMI on 1 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 March 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- ensure rigorous structures are put into place to hold middle leaders to account for their work
- plan a cycle of monitoring and evaluation to check the impact of actions taken to address the areas for improvement
- increase the challenge provided by governors by:
 - ensuring the governing body monitor and evaluate the actions taken to address the areas for improvement rigorously
- using the opportunities provided by school to-school support to strengthen governance.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, members of the governing body and the headteacher of Kelvin Hall School to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A telephone call was made to an external consultant who works with the academy. The academy improvement plan and other evidence provided by the academy were evaluated. You accompanied me on a learning walk in the academy.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection both the leadership team and the support staff team have been restructured.

Main findings

Senior leaders, ably led by you, have a concise plan which addresses the areas for improvement. The plan includes helpful success criteria and milestones by which leaders and governors can check the impact of actions taken to improve the academy. Although there is a cycle for the collection of progress data, there is not a systematic arrangement for monitoring and evaluating the work of the academy. The senior leadership team have been reorganised so their focus is on strategic leadership and student progress. Assistant principals will line manage middle leaders and hold them to account for their work. This line management structure is at an early stage and the processes for accountability are not in place. It is too soon to judge the impact of the new structure.

Middle leaders have worked with an external consultant on planning learning to help students make good progress. Further training for middle leaders about self-evaluation is planned for September, a number of them will undertake a nationally accredited qualification for middle leaders, and one middle leader is working with a Specialist Leader of Education (SLE). The impact of the work already done is that middle leaders have a greater understanding of their roles and the quality of teaching has improved.

There has been a strong focus on teachers' planning. Teachers respond to your high expectations that learning in all lessons will be planned, based on data about student's levels, so students make good or outstanding progress. Students understand this well. Examples of the impact of this were seen in English and mathematics lessons during the learning walk. In one mathematics lesson, Year 10 students were choosing to do the most complex problems because they knew that would help them to make better progress. The most able students are more regularly being challenged to achieve their potential. A group of most able Year 10 students are receiving specific mentoring to boost their progress. As a result, their grades are improving.

The quality of teaching is monitored through drop-in visits to lessons, formal lesson observations, and scrutiny of students' work and review of students' progress. Robust support plans with clear targets for improvement are in place to help and challenge teachers whose practice is not good. Consequently, the quality of teaching has improved.

The improvements in the quality of teaching are starting to impact positively on achievement in Years 7 to 10. The academy's own data show the current Year 10 students are on track to make progress in line with national expectations in English and mathematics when they complete their GCSE courses in 2016. However, data show the attainment in the current Year 11 is lower than that of their peers and the national average in 2014. Year 11 progress in English and mathematics is slightly better than that of the 2014 cohort, but still well below national expectations and the academy's challenging targets.

Work to develop literacy skills is at an early stage. Staff have received training about teaching spelling and writing. Timetable changes for the autumn term 2015 will provide less-able students with extra literacy lessons. A commercial scheme has been purchased to improve reading ability. Key leaders appointed to lead literacy will start in September 2015. It is too early to see the impact of the work on literacy.

Behaviour has improved. Students of all ages were seen behaving well during the learning walk. The academy has worked hard with a group of younger students who were causing disruption in lessons. Meetings with the students and their parents have had a positive impact. As a result, the group of students identified in the last inspection to lack concentration and behave immaturely has reduced significantly. The impact can be seen in the reduction of the number of students being removed from their lessons. A new behaviour policy will be launched in September.

Governors have reorganised their committee structure so the skills of members of the governing body are better used. Some governors have made visits to the school to see for themselves the impact of the actions taken to address the areas for improvement. However, these visits are informal and not part of a planned cycle of visits. Records of these visits do not share the purpose of the visits and feedback to the governing body meeting is a general observation of what was seen, rather than specifically focussing on an area for improvement. Questions, asked by governors and recorded in the minutes of the governing body meetings, are not probing enough about all the areas of the academy's work, including the progress of students.

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

External support

You make highly effective use of a variety of external support. Two consultants working with middle and senior leaders have enabled leaders to focus more closely on students' progress and have more clarity about their strategic roles. You have arranged very helpful school-to-school support with the headteacher of Kelvin Hall School, which is already impacting positively on leadership structures in the academy. Two primary SLEs are working in English and mathematics to improve transition from Year 6 to secondary school. It is too early to judge the impact of this work. A further SLE is working with a middle leader, with positive impact on middle leadership. A National Leader of Education is mentoring you and helping positively with leadership roles such as human resources.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for the City of Kingston upon Hull and as below.

Yours sincerely

Helen Lane
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- For academies [CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk]