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Mrs Saira Luffman
Principal
Swallow Hill Community College
Whingate Road
Leeds
West Yorkshire
LS12 3DS

Dear Mrs Luffman

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Swallow Hill Community College

Following my visit to your academy on 18 November 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.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in February 2015. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The sponsor's statement of action is now fit for purpose.

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 Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Leeds City Council.

Yours sincerely

Phil Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2015

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to be at least good, so that students make good or better progress and reach higher levels of attainment across the academy in all subjects and year groups, including in the sixth form and especially in mathematics and science, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - in all subject areas consistently apply the academy’s marking and feedback policy so students are given clear advice about how they can improve their learning and work, and also ensure that students are given sufficient opportunity to respond to this advice
 - make better use of assessment information to plan learning activities that enable all students to make at least good progress
 - provide opportunities for students to develop stronger literacy and numeracy skills across different subjects
 - share the good practice that exists among some teaching assistants and some teachers so that high quality support in all lessons is provided for disabled students and those who have special educational needs
 - consistently apply the academy’s behaviour management policy so students are fully engaged in their learning throughout their lessons.

- Strengthen further the impact of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by ensuring:
 - the further development of the consistency and quality of subject leadership, so these leaders are equally effective in improving teaching and in holding teachers to account for students’ progress
 - that recent changes to the curriculum are monitored and evaluated in terms of the impact they have on improving students’ engagement in learning and raising their achievement
 - that leaders give a high priority to the training of less experienced and less effective teachers in order to improve teaching and achievement
 - that through working closely with the families of those students who are frequently absent from school, students’ attendance continues to rise.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 18 November 2015

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the Principal, senior leaders in charge of teaching and learning, three governors and five middle leaders. Joint learning walks took place with middle leaders for mathematics, science and humanities and students' work was sampled. Meetings were also held with a group of Year 9–11 students and the Chief Executive from the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET). A variety of documentation was reviewed, including the minutes of governing body meetings, monitoring records of teaching and minutes of meetings between senior and middle leaders.

Context

A number of teachers have left the academy since the time of the last monitoring inspection. This includes the head of modern foreign languages, a mathematics teacher, two teachers of information and communication technology (ICT), two teachers of physical education (PE) and teachers in business, law, design technology, English and science. A vice principal is currently on secondment to a school in the North East of England.

New teachers who have joined since the last inspection include a new head of modern foreign languages, who has started very recently, two new science teachers, one mathematics teacher and one teacher of modern foreign languages.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The Principal continues to demonstrate high levels of ambition for both staff and students in the academy. She is steadfast in her determination to tackle existing weaknesses. The Principal, along with others in the academy, including governors, were bitterly disappointed, and shocked, by the outcomes achieved by Year 11 students in 2015. Teachers, across a wide range of subjects, predicted far more optimistic outcomes than the students actually achieved. This shows there is still a long way to go before the weaknesses, especially in relation to students' achievement, are successfully identified and tackled.

The Principal, along with her senior leaders, has responded quickly to start to put in place checks that will try to ensure that teachers are more precise and accurate in judging how well students will do in their examinations. Very recent curriculum changes have been made which allow more teaching time for English, mathematics and science. Plans are in place to make sure that students are tested on the latest work they have studied, as well as earlier topics. It is too soon to say whether these actions will have the intended impact of raising levels of attainment.

Elsewhere there are some signs of improvement. Attendance is rising and is significantly higher than it was at this point last year. This is partly due to the greater focus across the academy on the importance of good attendance, the improved range of rewards for good attendance and the 'truancy sweeps' that collect and bring students into the academy. The academy is also prepared to issue fines to parents who fail to send their children to the academy regularly.

Students feel teaching is beginning to improve. They say more teachers have higher expectations of them now. However, students are quick to point out that much still depends on which teacher they have. Learning walks carried out with middle leaders in mathematics, science and humanities confirm this. The quality and effectiveness of marking and feedback remain too variable. Some teachers do not do enough to mark regularly, tackle poorly presented work or use assessment information to make sure that teaching and feedback are appropriately challenging and that students make the progress they should.

Governors were 'devastated' by the 2015 outcomes. With hindsight they recognise they were too accepting of what senior leaders were telling them about student progress. Governors now recognise they need to be more incisive and probing when being presented with predictions on students' achievement.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Students report that teachers are more consistent in their use of the behaviour management policy. Students have a clear understanding of what the sanctions are for poor behaviour and there is a clear escalation of sanctions when poor behaviour occurs. Students also say they get on better with each other and there is a more harmonious environment in the academy.
- Some marking and feedback clearly follow academy marking and feedback policies. These teachers highlight areas of strength in students' work and where improvements need to be made. Some teachers identify literacy mistakes and make sure they are corrected.
- A number of middle leaders, particularly in English and mathematics, have developed clear and potentially helpful ways of checking whether teacher predictions are accurate and reliable. However, it is too soon to evaluate the impact of this work.
- Middle leaders in English, mathematics and science value the regular 'laser group' meetings that take place with senior leaders. These are enabling regular discussions to take place on the progress individual students are making and are increasing the levels of accountability across the academy.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teaching remains too variable, especially in mathematics and science. Not enough teachers are consistently using assessment information to make sure lessons are challenging enough to secure good or better progress over time.
- Too many middle leaders do not check carefully enough whether marking and feedback are having a positive impact on students' progress.
- It is not clear how identified weaknesses in teaching, marking or feedback are being tackled quickly. Regular meetings between senior and middle leaders do not check consistently on the impact actions are having on students' progress, and optional coaching sessions to improve teaching have had a poor uptake.

External support

Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection the sponsor has now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose. The statement of action is now better aligned to academy actions and there are clearer timescales for when actions will take place.

Since the previous monitoring visit in June, there has been an increase in the level of support the academy receives, especially in relation to English and mathematics. This has been welcomed by middle leaders and they find the regular visits helpful. However, AET consultants visiting the academy did not check carefully enough whether teachers were being too optimistic in their assessments of how well students would achieve, especially in Year 11. As a result, trust members were as shocked and surprised by the 2015 outcomes as academy leaders were.

Plans are now in place for Rodillian Academy to provide additional support. This support had not begun at the time of the inspection and so it is not possible to evaluate the impact of this work.