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3 December 2015

Mrs Karen Squire  
Principal  
Don Valley Academy and Performing Arts College  
Jossey Lane  
Scawthorpe  
Doncaster  
South Yorkshire  
DN5 9DD

Dear Mrs Squire

**Special measures monitoring inspection of Don Valley Academy and Performing Arts College**

Following my visit with Claire Brown, Her Majesty's Inspector and David Pridding, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 24 and 25 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 third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint NQTs after consultation with me, the lead HMI.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Education Advisory Board and the Director of Children's Services for Doncaster.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2014**

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching to be at least good or better throughout the academy so that students' progress accelerates not only in English and mathematics but also in all other subjects, by ensuring that:
  - teachers use the information about students' capabilities to plan well-targeted activities that meet their individual needs and set them appropriate challenges, especially for the most able
  - students' independence and self-reliance are developed so that they do not wait for teachers to provide help and advice
  - marking is done regularly, is of good quality, clearly understood by students and acted upon appropriately
  - teachers do not accept poorly presented and unfinished work
  - any inappropriate attitudes shown by students during and between lessons are challenged systematically and regularly
  - teaching assistants' skills are used effectively in lessons.
  
- Raise attainment in all subjects, including in the sixth form, ensuring that students of all different abilities make rapid and sustained progress.
  
- Embed securely the new systems and policies recently implemented so that leaders and managers at all levels take responsibility for bringing about improvements by:
  - making sure the monitoring of teaching is done regularly and evaluated appropriately so suitable support and challenge can be provided
  - using the findings of the academy's monitoring to set clear targets to be achieved so that initiatives can be checked to measure their impact on student progress
  - ensuring that students in all year groups understand the fundamentals of British values
  - holding middle leaders to account for the progress students make in their subjects and ensure that in turn middle leaders hold their staff to account
  - monitoring carefully students' attendance in the sixth form.
  
- Ensure that governors access available training so that they are better able to use information about students to hold leaders and teachers to account for the standards in their areas of responsibility.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 24 and 25 November 2015**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal and other senior leaders, a group of teachers, groups of pupils, members of the Education Advisory Board and a representative of the sponsor, School Partnership Trust Academies. Thirty part-lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. During these observations, inspectors sampled books and talked to pupils about their work. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour at social times around the academy site. Inspectors scrutinised improvement plans, records of behaviour and attendance, the academy's checks on the quality of teaching and recent departmental reviews. During this visit, inspectors focused particularly on the academy's work to improve behaviour and attitudes to learning.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection, a senior leader has rejoined the academy following a period of secondment. Eleven teachers have left the academy. Five new teachers joined the academy in September, three of whom were newly qualified teachers. A restructure of support staff has been completed. Two new appointments have been made to the Education Advisory Board.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

The 2015 GCSE examination results were a disappointment for the academy. Overall, standards declined, with only 38% of pupils in Year 11 attaining five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE level including English and mathematics. However, this headline figure does not tell the whole story.

In most subjects, pupils made better progress than in the previous year. For example, in English, the proportion of pupils who made expected progress across Key Stages 3 and 4 improved on the previous year to be close to the national average. In around three quarters of other subjects, including science, French, geography, art and on most vocational courses, pupils also made better progress.

However, progress in mathematics was poor, reflecting weaker teaching over time. Only around a third of pupils in Year 11 made expected progress in the subject. Many pupils who were expected to attain at least a GCSE grade C failed to do so. In part, this was because teachers of mathematics did not have a sufficiently accurate assessment of pupils' capabilities, and incorrectly entered too many for the higher-level examination. As a result, many pupils fell short and attained lower grades. Leaders have recognised this and have responded quickly to review assessment practice in the department. Additional external support has worked with the

department since September and has quickly established a more robust assessment approach. Examination entry in 2016 will be much more carefully considered.

A consequence of the weak outcomes in mathematics is that there is a significant group of learners in the sixth form who still need to attain a grade C or higher in the subject. The academy does provide effective specialist teaching for this group and a number are due to re-sit GCSE mathematics this month.

In 2015, the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils widened, despite the academy receiving around £330,000 each year in additional funding to support the learning of disadvantaged pupils. Less than one in five disadvantaged pupils attained five or more good GCSE grades including English and mathematics. Leaders and members of the Education Advisory Board know this is unacceptable. They are now ensuring the additional funding is spent on resources that directly support the learning of disadvantaged pupils. For example, the academy has appointed learning mentors who work exclusively with disadvantaged pupils. Additional teachers have been appointed in English and mathematics to keep class sizes relatively small. There are also better programmes in place to support disadvantaged pupils who enter the academy with weaker reading, writing and number skills. Nevertheless, improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils is a key priority for the academy.

The academy's most recent assessments suggest just over half of pupils in the current Year 11 are on track to attain five or more good GCSE grades including English and mathematics. However, these assessments indicate that pupils continue to make better progress in English than in mathematics. A second key challenge for leaders is to ensure mathematics teaching is of a consistently high standard, tackles gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding and delivers sustained progress.

### **The quality of teaching**

Senior leaders have a detailed picture of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. They continue to make regular observations of lessons and undertake detailed and comprehensive reviews of individual departments. Since the last monitoring inspection, they have taken decisive action to address some of the inadequate teaching that prevented pupils from making good progress. However, leaders know there is still some inadequate teaching that needs to be urgently addressed.

Overall, the quality of teaching is beginning to improve. Teachers' performance management objectives now hold them accountable for improving specific aspects of their practice. Teachers told inspectors their professional development time is more effective because they work with colleagues who share similar improvement needs. There are still considerable inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, however. For example, not all teachers use information on pupils' prior attainment effectively to inform their lesson planning. Because of this, some still set work that is too easy and

fails to challenge the most-able pupils. In addition, while the regularity of marking is now good, a few teachers provide feedback which is too vague to guide pupils and ensure real improvements.

Teachers have been given clear guidance about the particular aspects of teaching that need to be improved. They have focused on managing challenging behaviour more robustly and with greater authority. Inspectors noted few incidents of challenging behaviour on this visit and pupils told inspectors they had noticed behaviour was better. Teachers now apply sanctions and use rewards more consistently. Pupils who previously disrupted learning now spend time in the consequences room, which serves as an effective deterrent. As a result, most pupils now modify their behaviour in response to a simple warning. These changes are allowing lessons to flow more smoothly.

Teachers have also raised their expectations for the quality of presentation in books. Most teachers now challenge pupils who do not complete tasks or present untidy work. In many subjects, their raised expectations are already having a positive impact. However, there are still some departments where expectations are low. In science for example, too many books sampled showed a lack of pride, with too much untidy, incomplete and superficial learning going unchallenged by the teacher.

Newly qualified teachers who joined the academy in September have made a promising start. They have received good support and training since their arrival. The clear guidance they have received for managing behaviour has been reassuring and helped to develop their confidence.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

The behaviour of pupils at the academy is improving. Following the previous monitoring visit, leaders have relaunched the behaviour policy with all members of staff. Procedures for managing behaviour have been restated and leaders are checking that staff are following expectations. The introduction of the consequences room has helped to reduce incidents of more challenging behaviour. Pupils with social and emotional concerns are now better supported through the introduction of the inclusion unit. A small number of pupils who struggled to cope in the academy are now attending alternative provision on a part-time basis. Senior leaders are more prepared to use lengthier spells of exclusion where it is warranted. This combination of measures has helped to improve the climate for learning.

However, staff told inspectors, 'Behaviour is not yet where we want it to be.' They accept that more needs to be done to improve the negative attitudes of a minority of pupils. Some teachers do not take action early enough to tackle low-level disruption, when it occurs. As a consequence, disruptive behaviour sometimes escalates and impacts negatively on learning. Not all staff use the 'traffic light' system consistently,

in line with academy policy, and some pupils still attempt to push the boundaries of acceptable behaviour.

The behaviour of pupils at social times is also improving. Pupils mixed happily with one another and inspectors saw no incidents of aggressive or confrontational behaviour. Pupils indicated that this is now the norm. A focus on punctuality has also improved the pace of movement between lessons.

Last year, the proportion of pupils who were regularly absent was similar to the national average. This was an improvement on the previous year. However, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who missed school regularly was higher than that seen nationally. Disappointingly, regular absenteeism has begun to rise again this year, particularly among disadvantaged pupils. Given the need to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, attendance staff need to prioritise this group and secure their good attendance.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

Leaders were understandably disappointed by the 2015 examination results. Nevertheless, they know the mistakes that were made and have taken swift action to ensure the same errors are not made again. They rightly point to the improved rates of progress pupils are making, better behaviour and the improvements in teaching. Leaders are beginning to generate more momentum. They have the support of members of staff who appreciate the clarity of purpose leaders provide, and morale is rising.

The Principal has completed a restructure of staffing which now means the academy's finances are in better order. However, to ensure the ongoing financial position remains secure, members of the Education Advisory Board are considering carefully whether further restructuring will be required. The new academy building is on course to open in October 2016. Most of the work associated with this development is being managed by the Trust and is not distracting senior staff from the day-to-day running of the academy.

Leaders continue to check on the quality of teaching regularly. Training for teachers now meets their individual needs more effectively. The support provided for newly qualified teachers and those in their second year of teaching is of good quality.

Arrangements to support pupils' personal development are now more advanced. From September, the curriculum includes a single lesson each week covering topics linked to pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. Themes in these lessons are further developed in assemblies and in form time. Consequently, pupils are beginning to develop a better understanding of their place in society. Some younger pupils told inspectors they had appreciated the opportunity to discuss the impact of recent terror attacks in Paris. They also said recent lessons had helped

them to better understand equalities issues. They felt there was no homophobia in the academy, although they did say not all teachers challenged the occasional use of homophobic language.

Members of the Education Advisory Board continue to meet regularly to check on the academy's progress. They increasingly require middle leaders to attend meetings in order to hold them directly accountable. Members now spend more time on the site during the day so that they have a better first-hand knowledge of life in the academy. The Board has also been strengthened by the appointment of more parent members. However, there are still some areas of the academy's work where Board members' knowledge is weaker. For example, they accept that they need to know more about the impact of additional funding provided to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and those who enter the academy with lower levels of attainment. They urgently need to sharpen their focus on these groups of pupils, as their achievement is a considerable cause for concern.

### **External support**

The Principal is very open to utilising external support and works effectively with the regional director of Schools Partnership Trust Academies. Together, they are making effective use of the resources within the Trust. These resources are increasingly effective in driving improvement in the academy.

A number of Trust advisers work in the academy on a regular basis. They are having a positive impact in the core subjects of English and mathematics, and provide good support to senior leaders. The pace of improvement in mathematics has increased because of additional support from a strong subject leader from another Trust academy. Other subject leaders also benefit from access to a number of subject networks. The Principal finds the support and advice of other Trust academy Principals increasingly useful.