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25 February 2016

Mrs Karen Squire  
Principal  
Don Valley Academy and Performing Arts College  
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DN5 9DD

Dear Mrs Squire

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

Following my visit with Lynn Kenworthy, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 17 and 18 February 2016, 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 fourth 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:

**Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.**

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Chair of the Education Advisory Board, the Regional Schools Commissioner 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.

## **Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 17 to 18 February 2016**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal and other senior leaders, subject leaders of English and mathematics, a group of teachers, groups of pupils, representatives of the sponsor, School Partnership Trust Academies, and the Chair of the Education Advisory Board (EAB). Further meetings were held with representatives of the sponsor who are providing ongoing support to the academy. Inspectors observed 24 part-lessons and scrutinised pupils' English, mathematics and science books. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour and the general climate around the academy at social times. Inspectors scrutinised the academy's checks on the quality of teaching, records of behaviour and attendance, safeguarding information and the records of recent meetings held by the EAB. During this visit, inspectors focused particularly on the quality of teaching and on the progress pupils are making across different subjects and key stages.

### **Context**

Since the previous monitoring inspection, one teacher has left the academy. A second will leave at the end of this term. Two appointments have been made as replacements. One teacher has returned to the science department following a maternity leave. Two new staff members have been appointed to the EAB.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Senior leaders have continued to implement well-thought-through strategies based on a secure understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. They have responded positively to the key priorities for improvement highlighted in the previous monitoring visit. In particular, they have improved the quality of teaching through the regular, well-focused checks they make and through the increasingly bespoke training and support they provide. As a result, there is now very little inadequate teaching and expectations of what pupils can achieve are rising. In addition, gaps in the attainment of different groups of pupils are narrowing.

The leadership of the mathematics and English departments has improved, in response to good support from the sponsor. In both departments, teachers are working as effective teams. Both departments now have more refined arrangements for assessing pupils' progress and planning work that meets pupils' needs. The marking in both departments is increasingly effective and teaching strategies are increasingly consistent. As a result, pupils are making better and more consistent progress. Similarly good leadership is being seen in the modern foreign languages and physical education (PE) departments. However, the quality of middle leadership

is weaker in some other departments because some middle leaders do not do enough to hold colleagues to account for pupils' progress.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, there has not been a further meeting of the full EAB. The pupil progress committee met in January and received a report on the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils. Members have begun to ask more searching questions of senior leaders and intend to hold middle leaders accountable in their next meeting. However, information gathered by governors through their link roles with different departments is not always shared effectively enough and some governors are not sufficiently well informed about some aspects of the academy's work.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

The quality of teaching and learning is improving, but remains inconsistent across and within subjects. Leaders continue to manage the performance of teachers tightly and have taken further steps to eradicate inadequate teaching. As a result, very little inadequate teaching now remains. However, teaching is not yet consistently good enough to ensure pupils make good progress.

Where teaching is less effective, teachers continue to set work that is too easy, which sometimes fails to interest and engage pupils. Too frequently, teachers continue to provide the same work, regardless of pupils' differing levels of knowledge and understanding. Some teachers also rely too heavily on worksheets that guide pupils too much and restrict them from making decisions for themselves. Although some teachers do provide more open-ended and more thought-provoking activities, they do not always provide enough guidance on what they expect, or they allow the pace of learning to drop, resulting in slower progress.

Where teaching is stronger, teachers' planning takes account of pupils' different starting points and the tasks provided are more challenging. Teachers ensure lessons move at a brisk pace by setting time limits, checking on progress and moving the learning on when needed. They ask probing questions, often carefully targeted to involve pupils of different abilities, which require pupils to think deeply and make connections with learning covered in previous lessons. Increasingly, teachers are raising their expectations for pupils' behaviour and act with more authority to address any disruptions. Pupils modify their behaviour more readily now, in response to a teacher's verbal warning.

Work done to improve the quality of marking continues to have a positive impact. Most teachers now mark pupils' work regularly, in line with the academy's policy, and many provide feedback that leads to improvement. Increasingly, teachers challenge work that is not presented to a satisfactory standard. As a result of this, pupils now take more pride in their work. In response to challenge from senior leaders, science teachers have issued new books and made clear to pupils what they

expect. Although this development is at an early stage, pupils' attitudes in science show signs of improvement since the beginning of January.

Teachers now set more homework than in the past, particularly for pupils in Year 11, as they move towards examinations this summer. Pupils told inspectors they find the homework provided is helping them to consolidate their understanding of topics they cover in lessons.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Actions taken by senior leaders last term to improve behaviour have continued to have a positive impact. As a result, the climate for learning across the academy is now much more settled. Pupils and staff have all noticed the difference. Behaviour at social times is calm and pupils are mostly considerate and polite with one another. Pupils queue sensibly to get into the dining hall and follow the instructions of staff that supervise at break and lunchtime. There is very little litter around the academy site. Pupils move promptly to lessons and corridors are increasingly orderly as pupils arrive at their classrooms. Most lessons now get off to a brisk start.

During lessons, most teachers now apply the academy's behaviour system consistently and there is less disruption to lessons than there was in the past. Few teachers, for example, now allow pupils to call out or to chatter when they are talking. However, there remains a small minority of pupils that are prepared to disrupt learning, which results in them spending time in the 'consequences room'.

Arrangements to support those pupils with the most challenging behaviour are increasingly effective. For example, the support provided by the inclusion unit is of good quality. Pupils in the unit receive good teaching from specialist teachers and good support to help them manage their behaviour. Consequently, these pupils now remain in school and are making sound progress academically. Pupils at the greatest risk of exclusion now attend alternative provision at St Wilfred's School, which provides an appropriate curriculum for their needs.

Pupils feel safe and trust members of staff to deal with any incidents of bullying quickly and decisively.

So far this year, the proportion of pupils that have been excluded from the academy for a fixed period of time has increased to be well above the level seen nationally. The increase in the level of exclusion coincided with leaders' decision to review behaviour management policies. Since January, the number of exclusions has declined steadily, as the academy has improved its provision for those pupils that exhibit more challenging behaviour. Leaders recognise they must ensure levels of exclusion continue to decline across the rest of the year and has begun to work more closely with external agencies that provide specialist support.

Overall attendance has fallen slightly since the previous monitoring visit, but remains close to the national average.

## **Outcomes for pupils**

The achievement of pupils remains below average, although across most subjects a higher proportion of pupils are making expected progress.

Leaders are focusing much of their effort on improving the progress and attainment of pupils currently in Year 11. Better and more regular assessment now means teachers have a good understanding of the gaps in pupils' knowledge and are planning lessons to address these gaps more effectively. The work in English and mathematics books shows Year 11 pupils now regularly review and recap on areas of learning where assessments have revealed they had weaknesses. For example, the regular use of 'brain in gear' activities at the start of mathematics lessons is helping pupils to apply mathematics skills with greater fluency. Pupils identified as being below their targets now receive well-focused additional support in both English and mathematics. As a result of this more targeted approach, leaders are confident that achievement in this summer's examinations will be considerably better than last year. Leaders currently predict over half of pupils are on course to attain five or more GCSE A\* to C grades including English and mathematics.

The academy's assessment information also indicates that disadvantaged pupils are making better progress than in the past. Currently, nearly half of disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 are on course to attain five or more GCSE A\* to C grades including English and mathematics, which represents a significant improvement on last year. This is because the academy's strategy for the use of the pupil premium (additional funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after) is becoming more established. Disadvantaged pupils now receive good support from mentors during lessons and get additional English and mathematics teaching in small groups from subject specialists. Some disadvantaged pupils receive additional mathematics teaching on a daily basis during tutorial time from the subject leader for mathematics. In English, teachers have concentrated on securing a good standard of coursework from disadvantaged pupils, as this was identified as an area where pupils performed inconsistently in the past. Teachers across other subjects and key stages are providing better support for disadvantaged pupils in their classes. All members of staff are very much aware that improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils is a key priority for everyone.

Leaders are, however, less confident about the progress of pupils in Key Stage 3, because assessment information is less reliable. This is because the academy has begun to implement a new approach to assessment and teachers, as yet, are not confident in the new approach.

Despite pupils making better progress in a number of subjects, including English, mathematics and modern foreign languages, there remains some variability in the progress pupils are making across different subjects because the quality of teaching is inconsistent. In particular, the proportion of pupils making expected progress remains lower in design technology, humanities and science than in other subjects.

Learners in the sixth form are also making better progress than last year, with more learners on course to attain higher A-level grades than last year. Most learners who entered the sixth form without a GCSE grade C in English or mathematics successfully resat the examination in November.

### **External support**

The Principal continues to make good use of the resources available within the School Partnership Trust Academies and a local teaching school alliance. A high level of support has been sustained, which is having an increasingly positive impact. In particular, the regular support provided to the heads of English and mathematics is now securing better teaching, learning and assessment in both departments. Good support to the head of sixth form is also improving outcomes. In addition, the support provided for the induction and development of newly qualified teachers has helped them to settle quickly and thrive in the early stages of their careers.

Strategically, the regional director of the Trust continues to make regular checks on key performance indicators and provides good ongoing support to the Principal and other senior leaders.