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Mr C Weston
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Dear Mr Weston

Special measures monitoring inspection of Yewlands Technology College

Following my visit with Catherine Garrett, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 26 and 27 April 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 that have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 2015.

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 special measures.

The trust's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive committee, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sheffield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Cathryn Kirby
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in October 2015.

- Rapidly improve the outcomes for pupils by improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all areas of the academy in order to accelerate pupils' progress and increase standards by:
 - ensuring that teachers improve the behaviour of a few pupils in lessons through consistent and appropriate use of the academy's behaviour management systems so that pupils are allowed to learn at all times and are clear about expectations and routines;
 - sharing the good practice that already exists within the academy to effect improvements in all teachers' abilities to raise standards and outcomes;
 - ensuring that teachers take full account of the current knowledge, skills and understanding of pupils when planning lessons so that all groups are challenged and stretched to do their very best at all times;
 - insisting that teachers always provide work that inspires and engages all groups of pupils so that they are always interested and behave well;
 - insisting that pupils always present their work to the highest standards;
 - raising the expectations of teachers to ensure that they always believe that pupils are capable of more challenging work, particularly for the most able;
 - ensuring that the gaps in both standards and the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs are urgently reduced so that they make the same progress as their peers nationally;
 - accelerating the progress all groups of pupils make so that they achieve as well as their peers in other schools.

- Improve leadership and management so that they are able to effectively drive standards higher and accelerate the progress pupils make by:
 - creating a fully accurate appraisal of all areas of the academy through evaluation that can be used to develop an effective plan for school improvement with clear targets, timelines, responsibilities and accountability and ensure rapid progress for all pupils;
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels are able to be fully integrated into any plans for school improvement, know their roles well, are confident to be able to suggest ideas and know that they are contributing to the improvements for pupils;
 - using the pupil premium funding effectively to reduce the gaps in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils;
 - ensuring that the interim executive committee fully challenges leaders at all levels and rigorously holds them to account to quickly reverse any declines in

- pupil outcomes or standards of teaching, learning and assessment;
- quickly developing governance so that it is robust and secure;
- auditing and monitoring any support given to staff to ensure that it has an impact and improves standards quickly;
- further increasing attendance and taking positive action to reduce persistent absence, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs.

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 funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 26 to 27 April 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, a group of pupils and representatives of the interim executive committee (IEC) established by Wakefield City Academies Trust. The IEC provides governance arrangements. On this first monitoring inspection the focus was to establish the impact of leaders and managers on work to begin improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Context

Since the school was inspected in October 2015, three different leaders have occupied the position of headteacher. The current interim headteacher had been in post three weeks at the time of this monitoring visit. Other long-serving leaders have recently taken on new roles and/or responsibilities during the period since the section 5 inspection, including, most recently, the deputy headteacher.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Considerable change at the most senior level has hampered continuity and slowed improvement. Senior leaders have undertaken much monitoring of teaching and broadly know where the weaknesses lie. Armed with information from their own monitoring and from the section 5 inspection report, leaders have not been successful in establishing a clearly understood strategy to improve the quality of teaching.

Middle leaders and teachers have felt the brunt of constant change. They are not sure what to do or how to do it. In this regard, the trust has not been robust in providing support or challenge. Weaknesses in performance management, planning for improvement or the use of pupil premium funding are not being tackled quickly. Expectations of teachers are not made clear; in some classes they do not appear high enough. A thorough review of pupil premium spending and impact is yet to happen.

The school has not produced an action plan of the quality and usefulness that will support teachers to improve their practice and in turn accelerate pupils' progress. Senior leaders in the school have not been well supported by the trust to produce a purposeful document that links coherently to the trust's statement of action. The trust has retained the IEC to provide governance arrangements and has not therefore undertaken a review. Members of the IEC recognise that a revised statement of action and school development plan, separate or combined, are essential to move school improvement forward in a sustainable way.

Senior leaders are determined that the school will improve following a slow start. They are united in the intention to galvanise themselves and staff to make up lost ground during the remaining summer and autumn terms. In this they will require the full support of the trust, including the IEC.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The picture of teaching, learning and assessment reflects the position at October 2015. Teaching quality has not moved on appreciably because there is no clear strategic plan to move it forward. As the pupils themselves say, the quality of teaching relies heavily on the individual teacher, rather than a departmental or whole-school approach. Mathematics teaching, however, received praise from Year 11 pupils, and inspectors saw some strong teaching in mathematics.

Frequently, expectations of pupils are too low, including the lack of challenge for the most able. Absent from classrooms is an effective whole-school strategy to support literacy across the range of subjects. Where teaching does challenge pupils and teachers expect pupils to rise to higher expectations, learning and progress move at pace. However, in the next classroom or along the corridor, tasks may be mundane, and completing worksheets that are subsequently stuffed into workbooks fills the time. Some teachers talked about 'pockets of best practice', with a sense of frustration that this practice is not shared to upskill others.

Teachers' approaches to marking and other aspects of practice are too variable. For example, some teachers tolerate behaviours that others would challenge. Pupils noted this inconsistency when reflecting on their experiences of school. Some teachers routinely accept scruffy work that would have no place in another class. Currently, inconsistency in most aspects of teaching and no clear plan to iron this out is the barrier to improvement.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The majority of pupils display respect for others. In most lessons pupils comply with teachers' requests. Enthusiasm, though, is a rarer commodity. Teachers show different tolerance levels of low-level disruptive behaviours. This inconsistent behaviour management, in providing mixed messages, is not helpful for pupils. Inspectors observed some poor behaviour that was not challenged by teachers.

Often, pupils lack the confidence to articulate their point of view or engage in group discussion. This is an aspect of their personal development that can diminish the potential for learning, even in the context of some innovative activities developed by teachers. Pupils' lack of confidence also has implications for future employment or success in securing training or education after GCSEs. Attendance is showing a slight improvement compared to this time last year, but is still below average. Year 10 attendance is particularly low at 92.4%. Persistent absence figures show a positive change. Persistent absence for pupils who have special educational needs

or disability has almost halved this year. So far this school year, on five out of six courses delivered by alternative providers, attendance is above 90%, and on two of these courses it is above 95%. Given the travel distances involved for some pupils this is an encouraging position from which to make further gains. On the second day of this inspection 28 pupils arrived after the 8:30 start to the first teaching period.

Outcomes for pupils

The school is predicting improved attainment and progress for current Year 11 pupils. Pupils themselves say that intensive additional support outside lessons is supporting their revision. Other year groups, for whom outcomes rely on timetabled teaching rather than intensive support, are showing less marked improvements in outcomes. The school's assessments show that Year 10, the group with the lowest attendance, is making fewest gains.

The development of pupils' spelling, vocabulary and speaking skills receives insufficient attention. In some books incorrect spellings are identified, but the next steps do not follow. In other books teachers make the correction, and in others still, spellings go uncorrected over time. Where teachers are content with one-word answers and do not probe and encourage, pupils lose out on the practice and development of oracy skills – an important attribute valued by many employers.

External support

The trust has not provided effective practical support in a number of key aspects of the school's work. This is despite the IEC identifying weaknesses, for example in improvement planning, performance management and the use of pupil premium. The absence of a link between a statement of the trust's intention to support improvement and the senior leaders' development plan is a key reason for the slow start to the school's journey through special measures – too many leaders in the school are unclear about who is responsible for what and when, or how impact will be judged. Recent changes to arrangements in the trust have resulted in more time from senior officers being allocated to the school. This is a welcome and necessary move.