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8 July 2016

Adam Williams
Chief Executive Principal
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Dear Mr Williams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Ridings Federation Yate International Academy

Following my visit to your school on 20 June 2016, 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 school since the most recent section 5 inspection. Please also pass my thanks on to the principals of the secondary and primary phases and to the other senior staff, teachers, governors and pupils I met during my visit.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in October 2015, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders, governors and the trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The principal and senior leadership team in the secondary phase, who all took up their current posts in September 2015, have made a wide range of significant improvements to the school. Many of these are already showing evidence of impact, raising pupils' achievement and improving their attendance and behaviour. Further improvements have also been made in the primary phase under the continuing good leadership of the primary principal. However, given the nature of this all-through school for pupils aged three to 19 and the significant recent changes to the senior leadership, subject leadership, arrangements for 16 to 19 (sixth form)

students and governance, I recommend a further monitoring visit before the next inspection of the school.

The school should take further action to ensure that all of the improvements made are applied consistently in all year groups and curriculum areas.

Evidence

The inspection focused on the areas for improvement identified in the October 2015 inspection report. These almost entirely related to the secondary provision. However, the primary and nursery provision was also visited as part of this monitoring inspection visit.

During the inspection, meetings were held with the principals of the secondary and primary phases as well as with you to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Meetings were also held with other senior leaders, the new head of mathematics, the chair of the board of trustees and members of the 'shadow' local governing body. The school improvement plan and the impact of the actions taken to raise pupils' achievement were evaluated. Visits to lessons were undertaken with the principal and chief executive principal in the secondary provision and with the principal in the primary and early years provision. In these lessons, the inspector looked at pupils' work and talked with them about it.

The school leaders' and governors' response to the review of the use of pupil premium funding and the review of governance were also evaluated.

Context

The school is part of the Ridings Federation, a multi-academy trust. There has been a wide range of highly significant changes to the leadership of this all-through school for pupils aged three to 19 since just before the October 2015 inspection.

The secondary principal joined the school in September 2015. All members of the secondary senior leadership team took up their current posts at that time, and most were new to the school. You took up your post as chief executive principal for the Ridings Federation on 1 February 2016. A new head of mathematics (a key subject for the school) took up post six weeks before this monitoring visit. One fifth of secondary teachers are new to the school this year, including an almost completely new mathematics department. There is now stability in the teaching staff and no full-time teachers plan to leave the school at the end of this year.

At the start of September the school entered into a collaborative arrangement with the two other local secondary schools to provide courses for 16 to 19 students.

Provision for pupils aged three to 11 continues to be provided in Woodlands Primary and Nursery, which is part of the school but has its own principal.

There have been a series of changes to governance within the Ridings Federation. The initial arrangements, with an overall board of trustees and a local governing body for each school, were abandoned and a single overall board was established. This decision was recently overturned and local governing bodies are being re-established. The current local governing body for this school has a 'shadow' role until it is formally constituted in time for the start of the new school year in September 2016. A review of governance across the Ridings Federation was completed in February 2016.

Main findings

At the time of the inspection, the principal for the secondary phase and other senior leaders had undertaken a wide-ranging and rigorous evaluation of all aspects of the secondary and 16 to 19 provision. Their findings were confirmed and reinforced by the October inspection. This evaluation led to an accurate and perceptive understanding of what needed to be improved, including significant and rapid improvements to the quality of teaching, in order to raise pupils' achievement. A similar exercise was undertaken by the principal of the primary phase, although there were far fewer areas of concern in this phase. All leaders and governors recognise the sense of urgency needed to make this a good school.

An intensive cycle of monitoring, repeated every seven weeks and matched to the modular organisation of the curriculum, was introduced for all year groups, including the sixth form. This monitoring follows a repeating pattern of analysis of current achievement data, observations of teaching and learning, extensive checking of pupils' work, talking with pupils and the tracking of identified individual pupils across a range of lessons and subjects. Teachers' assessment information is checked carefully to test its reliability and accuracy by comparing it with subject and senior leaders' checking of the quality and level of pupils' work and the progress this shows. As a result, leaders have an accurate picture of the quality of teaching and pupils' progress and achievement. This shows that achievement for all groups, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able, has improved at each review point over the year so far. Pupils' achievement in mathematics has improved and the gap in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and others has narrowed. The gap that existed in English has closed completely.

This tight monitoring of pupils' progress and of the quality of teaching enables leaders to precisely identify the professional development teachers need: for all teachers; within curriculum areas; and for individual teachers who need focused support. A good programme of training has led to sustained improvements in the overall quality of teaching. However, senior leaders know that further improvement is required in some subjects and for some teachers. Teachers who

showed a lack of willingness or ability to improve are no longer teaching in the school.

Teaching is now typified by much higher expectations of what pupils can achieve, better use of assessment information in planning and teaching, higher levels of challenge and better feedback to pupils to help them improve their work. Many pupils now respond well to this feedback and make good use of the time they are given to make corrections or redraft parts of their work. Teachers are increasingly provided with detailed information on pupils, particularly those who are vulnerable and those supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding). This gives teachers practical, tried and tested, and effective strategies to support the achievement of the individual pupil. While this is still being rolled out, it is already making a difference for some vulnerable pupils.

The good features of the primary and early years provision noted in the October inspection report have been sustained. The principal of the primary provision agreed that the achievement of the most able pupils and the achievement of disadvantaged pupils in mathematics needed to improve. These pupils are currently on track to do much better, although the principal fully recognises that the higher national expectations this year mean that overall achievement may be less positive.

Leaders' evaluation had identified that the secondary curriculum was not fit for purpose. More time has been given to English and mathematics. The number of options available to each pupil has been reduced, with better guidance to ensure that they follow a curriculum best suited to their needs and aspirations. The science courses now meet pupils needs better. These changes have contributed to the improvements in pupils' achievement. Good attention is given to raising pupils' skills in reading, writing and oral communication from often very low starting points. The new head of mathematics is working on developing more consistent approaches to calculation across all subjects. Good collaborative work between the primary and secondary phases is beginning to ensure more rapid progress in the early years of the secondary phase.

Pupils' behaviour around the school is much improved from that noted in the October 2015 inspection. During lesson changeovers, breaktime and at lunchtime the school is calm and well ordered. The behaviour of the large number of secondary pupils in the dining room during a very wet day was impressive. Pupils are polite and a pleasure to talk to.

Senior leaders undertook a detailed survey of pupils' and parents' views about behaviour in lessons. This identified a group of about 50 pupils who caused disruption in lessons that interfered with the learning of others. An ongoing series of workshops with these pupils has dramatically reduced the incidents of poor behaviour and the number of pupils involved. As a consequence, lessons proceed more smoothly and pupils and parents are much more positive about behaviour in the school.

Overall attendance and the attendance of groups of pupils, such as disadvantaged pupils, have improved significantly over the year. The number who are persistently absent has reduced. This is due to senior and pastoral leaders' intensive focus on individual pupils.

Senior leaders have worked successfully to create an ethos and culture in the school where pupils want to do well, feel safe, are valued and take a pride in their community. The effectiveness of this is clear in the improvements in achievement, pupils' attitudes to their work, behaviour and attendance. The well-planned series of themes of the week and key questions for discussion in tutor group sessions have improved pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and enabled them to discuss sensitive and controversial issues. Senior leaders know that more still needs to be done to ensure that this is consistently good for all year groups.

Changes to the sixth-form curriculum mean that it better meets the needs of a wider range of students. Achievement is on track to improve this year, but there is still too much variation in the achievement of students with similar starting points and across the range of subjects. The improved curriculum has led to improvements in retention, but still too few students complete their course.

The new local governing body is being formed and trained so that it is fully operational for 1 September 2016. There is already a good balance and breadth of expertise that will enable governors to hold senior leaders to account. The training has already identified some gaps, and additional governors are being recruited with the skills required. Governors already have a clear idea of what the school leaders still need to improve. They have a precise understanding of which groups of pupils are not yet attending, behaving or achieving as well as they should. The local governing body is well equipped to provide the school leaders with the support, as well as challenge, needed for this to become a good school. Good consideration has been given to the findings of the external review of the governance of the Ridings Federating.

External support

The school works closely with the other school in the Ridings Federation, the Winterbourne International School, to share expertise to raise the quality of teaching further. The school is linked to Chipping Sodbury School and Brimsham Green School through the Cotswold Edge arrangements to provide a greater breadth of study programmes for 16 to 19 students. This is beginning to improve retention and raise achievement in the sixth form. Senior leaders have good relationships and work with the school improvement and other services within the local authority. The leaders of the primary school work with the local authority and other schools, for example to moderate the assessment of pupils' work. The school leaders are outward-looking and use their contacts with other schools and multi-school trusts to learn from best practice.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees of the Ridings Federation, the regional schools commissioner, the Education Funding Agency and the director of children's services for South Gloucestershire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

James Sage
Her Majesty's Inspector