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17 May 2017

Mr Graham Moffatt
Principal
South Leeds Academy
Old Run Road
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Dear Mr Moffatt

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of South Leeds Academy

Following my visit to your school on 4 May 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in December 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, two representatives from the education advisory board (EAB), the school's governing body, two representatives from Delta Academies Trust, a representative from Cockburn Multi-Academy Trust and a group of Year 11 pupils. I visited classrooms with senior leaders, spoke to pupils and looked at the work in their books. I evaluated the academy trust's statement of action and the school's action plan.

Context

Since the last inspection, an associate vice-principal has joined the school's senior leadership team. The school is currently sponsored by Delta Academies Trust and Cockburn Multi-Academy Trust is the school's proposed new sponsor.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

You know exactly what needs to be done to tackle the key weaknesses identified at the school's last section 5 inspection and you are taking decisive action to secure the much needed improvement. Your action plan provides a strong starting point because it focuses sharply on each of the areas for improvement, has clear timescales and includes measurable step-by-step targets for all actions. Importantly, the plan makes it clear who is responsible for tackling each weakness and it specifies how senior leaders, members of the EAB and the academy trust will check whether the actions being taken are having the necessary impact.

You have secured the strong support of staff and there is a shared determination to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Senior and middle leaders are providing valuable training and support for teachers. They are well supported by the academy trust's subject directors who give them helpful advice and guidance. Systems for monitoring teachers' practice are developing. However, middle leaders do not have a sharp enough focus on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress, especially the most able pupils and those who are disadvantaged. This limits the effectiveness of the school's drive to rapidly improve outcomes for these key groups of pupils.

Although overall attendance is improving steadily as a result of the actions you and your staff are taking, you are not doing enough to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Levels of absence and persistent absence for disadvantaged pupils remain unacceptably high and your actions do not have the necessary urgency and intensity. Importantly, however, changes to the behaviour policy and consequences system and improvements in teaching, learning and assessment are having a positive impact on pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. Indeed, the Year 11 pupils I spoke to were unequivocally positive about the difference these changes have made since the last inspection.

You are keeping a close eye on the implementation of your action plan and its impact on pupils' learning and progress, especially those in Year 11. Much has been done to make sure that teachers are assessing pupils' work accurately. As a result, you have a clearer picture of how well Year 11 pupils are doing and you know, week by week, which pupils need additional help and support to achieve their target GCSE grades. You are now using this approach to check whether Year 10 pupils are on track and identify those who need additional help or support. In contrast, your approach to supporting Year 7 pupils who need extra help to catch up in English and mathematics is less well targeted and effective.

The EAB receives detailed information and reports about the implementation of your action plan from you, other senior and middle leaders and the academy trust's subject directors. Members of the EAB are better informed about the school's performance and the effectiveness and impact of the actions you are taking. As a result, they are challenging you and holding you to account more robustly.

Rightly, the academy trust has given careful consideration to the school's future leadership and governance. It has been proposed that the school will move to a new sponsor, Cockburn Multi-Academy Trust. The chief executives of the current and proposed academy trusts are already working closely together. There is a demonstrable commitment from both trusts to provide the continued high-quality support needed to secure and sustain rapid improvement at South Leeds Academy.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium was commissioned last term. You recently received the report from this review and the recommendations add helpfully to your understanding of what needs to be done to increase the impact of this additional funding on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. An external review of governance has been commissioned and will take place later this term. This is appropriately timed, considering the proposal for the school to move to a new sponsor. Crucially, however, those responsible for the school's leadership and governance must make sure that the actions they take in response to this review add further impetus and urgency to the school's drive for improvement.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The academy trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the education advisory board, the chair of the board of Delta Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Leeds. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nick Whittaker

Her Majesty's Inspector