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17 April 2018

Mr Stephen Henry  
Fulwood Academy  
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Dear Mr Henry

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fulwood Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 20 March 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help that 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.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders, governors and the trust are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The trust should take further action to:

- ensure that governors and leaders are held fully to account for the quality of education that the school provides.

Leaders should take further action to:

- ensure that improvement plans, including the pupil premium plan, clearly reflect the key actions required to improve the school and that they contain quantifiable measures of success
- ensure that governors have the required information that they need to hold leaders to account

- tackle the remaining areas for improvement outlined at the previous inspection that have not been adequately addressed
- ensure that pupils' progress, including that of disadvantaged pupils, improves rapidly by the end of key stage 4, in particular in English, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages
- ensure that teachers plan more effectively for the different abilities within their classes.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the principal, other senior leaders, middle leaders, pupils, and representatives of the governing body and a telephone call was held with the academy sponsor to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was also evaluated.

As part of the inspection, I jointly undertook learning walks with the vice-principal. I scrutinised pupils' work during lessons and I also undertook a formal scrutiny of pupils' work from Years 9 and 11. I reviewed the school's evaluation of its effectiveness and I examined leaders' information about the progress made by current and past pupils. In addition, I examined the minutes from governing body meetings, teaching and learning records and the checks that leaders make to ensure that staff are suitable to work with pupils.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection the school's sixth form has closed. Three new governors have been appointed, including a new chair of the governing body with an educational background, a new chair of the standards committee and a new member of the finance committee. Also since the previous inspection, a new vice-principal has been appointed to replace a senior leader who left the school. Two new assistant principals have been appointed; one is an additional post to add further capacity to the leadership team. In September 2017, leaders appointed a new director of mathematics from outside the school. Also, a new director of English and a new director of science were promoted from within the school. In January 2018, a new director of modern foreign languages was appointed.

## **Main findings**

The principal and governors recognise that there is much work to do to improve the school until it provides a good standard of education. They acknowledge that they are on a journey of continual improvement that is going to take considerable time. Only recently has the principal managed to get the right leaders, teachers and governors in place. While this has now been achieved, improvements remain fragile. Although leaders, including governors, are fully aware of what needs to be done, they have not sufficiently implemented the key actions required to improve the

quality of education that the school provides. Added to this, the trust, including the sponsor, has not held leaders and governors to account for the pace of improvements. For example, it has not ensured that the key actions identified at the previous inspection have been adequately addressed.

That said, leaders and governors know the school well. They accept that they have not acted swiftly enough to bring about the required improvements. They know that there is much work to do to ensure that outcomes for pupils are consistently good, particularly at key stage 4. This is because standards have not improved at the pace required. For example, by the end of key stage 4 in 2016 and 2017, outcomes across a range of subjects, including English, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages, were in the bottom 20% of schools nationally. Too many groups of pupils underachieved in relation to their starting points, including disadvantaged pupils, middle-ability pupils and the most able pupils. While there are some notable improvements at key stage 3, outcomes for current pupils remain weak across key stage 4, particularly in Year 11. For example, leaders' own information shows that the differences between the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally are not diminishing quickly enough by the end of Year 11.

The progress made by disadvantaged pupils remains a key concern for leaders and governors. Although leaders are now beginning to take action to address this weakness, improvements to date have been too slow. Leaders have not been able to show clear impact in relation to improving the progress made by this group of pupils, which accounts for around half of the school's population. For example, they have not implemented some of the key recommendations from the pupil premium review that took place in October 2016. Although this was a key area for improvement at the previous inspection it has not been addressed with sufficient rigour.

The progress of disadvantaged pupils is also still weak partly because governors and the trust have not held leaders fully to account for the quality of their work. This is because governors and the trust cannot check how well leaders' action plans are promoting improvements for this group of pupils. For example, the improvement plans relating to disadvantaged pupils lack clarity, focus and quantifiable measures of success. Added to this, many of the key actions identified in the pupil premium plans remain the same as the previous year, despite them not having the desired effect on improving outcomes for pupils at the pace required.

Another key concern is that governors do not have a clear understanding of how well pupil premium pupils are progressing across the curriculum. They do not have a secure enough understanding of the school's assessment information. The new chair of the governing body and chair of the standards committee, with the new pupil premium lead, are clearly determined to quickly improve outcomes for these pupils. These leaders now need time to prioritise the key actions required to overhaul standards.

A further key priority for improvement that has not adequately been addressed is to improve the attendance rates of disadvantaged pupils. To date, the overall attendance rate for all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, has in fact declined. The proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school has also risen markedly. More recently, leaders have appointed a new vice-principal and assistant principal who are beginning to have a positive effect reviewing the school's systems to monitor behaviour and attendance. However, governors do not routinely track the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent from school.

In addition to the pupil premium strategy, leaders' whole-school improvement plan is not fit for purpose. It does not contain the key actions required to improve outcomes for pupils. It is too generic. Leaders acknowledge this deficit and are determined to ensure that it is focused, accessible and clearly understood by all stakeholders. However, the current plan, like the pupil premium strategy, does not contain clear measures of success by which governors and the trust can hold leaders to account. Furthermore, it is not always clear who is responsible for checking that key actions are being completed and to the standard required.

Leaders have been much more effective in improving the quality of teaching across the school. They have strengthened middle leadership considerably. However, many of these leaders are new to their roles and they have not had the time to have a marked impact on improving pupils' learning and progress so that outcomes improve. They have, however, implemented revised schemes of work in key stage 3 to strengthen the curriculum. They have also ensured that assessment systems are much more thorough. Leaders and teachers are routinely seeking external validation of the quality of work that pupils produce to ensure that it meets the required standard.

Leaders have also taken some effective steps towards raising expectations of what pupils can and should achieve in lessons. The expectations around the quality of pupils' work in books has improved and most pupils take pride in their learning. It is clear that teachers are planning activities that engage most pupils. That said, there is still insufficient challenge. Too frequently, teachers do not plan lessons that routinely meet the different needs of pupils in their classes. Pupils say that they often all do the same work in lessons. Leaders recognise that they need to raise expectations further and challenge pupils more. This is so that pupils make the progress of which they are capable of in relation to their starting points.

Leaders have also strengthened their monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers receive regular support and coaching to improve their practice and they have an appropriate ongoing training programme. Teachers value this support. Leaders are also in the process of ensuring that teachers have the required knowledge, skills and understanding to teach the new key stage 4 GCSE syllabuses.

Leaders have also been successful in improving pupils' literacy in lessons. There has been a focus on fostering a love of reading across the school and teachers know the

importance of promoting high-quality spelling, punctuation and grammar at every opportunity. In pupils' books there is evidence of extended writing. Leaders have reduced the proportion of pupils whose reading age is below their chronological age.

Without doubt, the school has a team of committed, highly motivated staff who are determined to make a difference to outcomes for pupils. Clear, strategic direction from leaders will support them in using their teaching strategies to improve outcomes for pupils.

Pupils are strong advocates of the school. They behave well and show tolerance and respect for one another. During the inspection, pupils were clear that they have seen notable improvements to the quality of teaching and behaviour across lessons. Pupils are ready to learn. They are proud of their school and are equally proud of their teachers who they say go the extra mile to help and support each of them.

### **External support**

Although the school is receiving ongoing support from the trust, it is not having sufficient impact on improving outcomes for pupils, particularly pupils at key stage 4, including disadvantaged pupils. Some aspects of the recommendations from the previous inspection report have not been tackled with sufficient rigour. The trust is not holding leaders sufficiently to account for the quality of education that the school provides.

Although a local national leader of education undertook a review of the impact of pupil premium spending prior to the previous inspection, not all of the key actions and recommendations have been addressed. The trust should consider how leaders, including governors, can be supported and challenged to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils much more quickly.

Since the previous inspection, in partnership with a local teaching alliance, leaders have undertaken a subject review of English and science. Another local teaching school has provided support for modern foreign languages. Four senior leaders have undertaken national leadership programmes and one additional leader is about to embark on the programme.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, the sponsor, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Smart  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**