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8 November 2019

Mrs Jackie Nellis
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Dear Mrs Nellis

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lightcliffe Academy

Following my visit with Gordon Watts, Ofsted Inspector, and Lyndsey Brown, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 15–16 October 2019, 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 November 2018.

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.

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

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Barry Found

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2018.

- Urgently improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to increase the rates of progress for pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, boys and the most able, by:
 - ensuring that teachers use prior assessment information to plan activities that meet pupils’ needs and abilities effectively
 - raising teachers’ expectations of what pupils can achieve so that all pupils are challenged appropriately
 - identifying ways in which absent pupils can swiftly catch up on missed work when they return to school
 - introducing a school-wide approach to improving pupils’ literacy skills
 - raising teachers’ awareness of underperforming groups of pupils and implementing strategies to accelerate pupils’ progress.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management so that the persistent weaknesses in the school’s provision improve swiftly by ensuring that:
 - all staff consistently and effectively apply school policies
 - senior leaders, governors and trustees urgently address the weaker leadership and teaching that exist in the school
 - curriculum plans provide teachers with detailed guidance on the progression of pupils’ knowledge, skills and understanding in a range of subjects, particularly in key stage 3
 - additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is used effectively
 - leaders have a detailed understanding of the patterns and trends of bullying so that they can pre-empt it or support vulnerable groups of pupils when required
 - trustees improve the quality of governance sufficiently so that governors have a significant impact on the overall quality of education pupils receive
 - senior leaders sustain the recent improvements in the quality of staff training.
- Improve the quality of pupils’ personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - implementing strategies to improve pupils’ attendance and reduce instances of persistent absenteeism effectively, particularly for disadvantaged pupils
 - reducing instances of disruptive behaviour
 - supporting pupils to be successful learners and ensuring that pupils take pride in their work.
- Improve provision in the sixth form by ensuring that:

- teachers consistently provide learning opportunities that challenge students
- students attain highly and make stronger progress over time
- leaders evaluate and act on their findings from monitoring activities in a timely manner
- rates of retention on vocational courses improve considerably.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 15 October 2019 to 16 October 2019

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, senior and middle leaders, groups of teachers at different stages of their careers, the co-chief executive officers (CEOs) of Abbey Multi-Academy Trust and, in addition, an inspector had a phone conversation with the chief executive officer of a multi-academy trust providing external support to the school. Inspectors also met with pupils from each year group and talked with pupils during breaktimes and lunchtimes.

Inspectors visited a range of lessons and activities, jointly with senior leaders.

During this first monitoring visit, inspectors focused on the areas for improvement linked to the quality of education, pupils' behaviour and attitudes, leadership and management and the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures.

Context

Since the inspection in November 2018, there have been significant changes in staffing at all levels. The principal left at the end of the autumn term 2018, a vice-principal left the school earlier in the term. In January 2019, two co-chief executive officers were appointed to lead the trust. The board of trustees maintains the responsibility for holding the chief executives to account for the performance of the schools in the multi-academy trust. In the spring term of 2019, an interim principal and two interim vice-principals were appointed to the school's senior leadership. In addition, new governance arrangements were put into place in the summer term. External reviews of both governance and the use of additional funding were commissioned by the trust, and the recommendations made through these reviews were incorporated into a reviewed statement of action and academy improvement plan.

Several teachers have left the school since the last inspection and appropriate permanent replacements have been recruited. A permanent principal was appointed for September 2019, along with two vice-principals. Senior leadership roles and responsibilities have been restructured. Furthermore, several experienced school leaders from within the trust have been deployed at the school to support the development of teaching, learning, curriculum, assessment and leadership, and management.

The trust has recently brokered support from another multi-academy trust. The school has made use of this support since September 2019.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

The Quality of Education

The curriculum on offer is broad and balanced and has at its heart, the EBacc qualification. However, leaders have recognised that the EBacc is not a pathway which will suit all pupils. Pupils' choices of pathway in the past have not always been the appropriate ones. Consequently, leaders are developing a curriculum which holds true to the principle of opportunities for all, while providing all pupils with pathway choices which meet individual needs.

Curriculum and senior leaders have worked closely with partner primary schools to inform their review of the key stage 3 curriculum and schemes of work. Leaders' aim is to develop greater challenge for pupils and to ensure that pupils' prior learning is secure, and that future learning builds on it. The impact of this work on the progress of pupils in key stage 3 is not clear to see and will be a focus for the next monitoring visit. However, it is clear to see the difference in the engagement of pupils in their learning at key stage 3 when compared to that of pupils in key stage 4. Pupils in key stage 3 enthusiastically engage with teaching and with each other in their learning progress. In key stage 4, this is not as evident.

The development of curriculum planning is not as advanced in key stage 4 as it is in key stage 3. The sequence of learning in some subjects at key stage 4 has not been given enough thought. There also remains a focus on ensuring that pupils have the knowledge they require to answer examination questions. While this is an important element to ensure that pupils achieve the qualifications they need to pursue their desired pathways after leaving the school, in some cases, important bits of knowledge which will help them with future learning and more complex concepts have not been learned effectively. This can limit pupils' understanding of their current work.

The school is developing its approaches to assessment in key stage 3 to identify the important concepts and knowledge that pupils do not remember. Assessment points are being thought about so that they complement the sequencing of curriculum delivery. However, this is in the very early stages. In contrast, this is much less developed in key stage 4, where assessment aims to identify gaps in examination knowledge. The assessment provides teachers with the information they need to 'reteach' examination knowledge so that pupils can access the marks they require to pass examinations.

Literacy is a whole-school focus and half-termly targets, such as improving pupils' knowledge of subject vocabulary, and providing pupils with spelling, punctuation and grammar guidance in all subjects, are high profile across the school. The impact of this work is clear to see in pupils' books. However, there do remain some inconsistencies in how effectively this approach is being applied.

Leaders are realistic and accurate in their views regarding the work to improve the quality of education which remains to be done.

Pupils report that teaching and learning are now more consistent since the number of supply and cover teachers has reduced.

Behaviour and Attitudes

Pupils and staff report that there has been significant improvement in pupils' behaviour both in lessons and around the building. There is a much greater presence of staff around the site and inspectors recognise that behaviour does not resemble that described in the previous inspection report. Most pupils are respectful towards each other, staff and visitors. Inspectors observed a consistent approach in managing behaviour in classrooms. Leaders have involved staff in the review of the school's approaches to behaviour management through focused training and role-modelling around the school. In all the lessons visited by inspectors, pupils were cooperative and respectful of teachers and visitors. Most pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning.

At this point early in the new academic year, it is not possible to judge the longer term impact of leaders' actions on the rates of exclusion. 'Spikes' in exclusions correspond to raised expectations since the start of the new term. Leaders are expecting these levels to fall as pupils become familiar with these new expectations. Leaders have introduced a 'nurture' facility, offering pupils a range of alternative sessions which are aimed at re-engaging and supporting those pupils who are vulnerable to exclusion.

The attendance of pupils remains below that of pupils nationally. The proportion of pupils who fail to attend school regularly is above the national average too. Since the last inspection, a new attendance team has been created with new leadership from an assistant principal. The trust has ensured that tried and tested strategies to improve attendance have now been embedded into the practice of the school. Consequently, some small improvements have been noted. Many of those pupils who benefit from sessions in the 'nurture' facility have improved their attendance. However, there is much more work to do in this area to make the necessary further improvements.

The structure of pastoral and academic support for pupils has been reviewed, resulting in significant changes. The system of house captains and vertical tutor groupings, based on a house system, has been replaced with year specific tutor groups. These are supported by heads of year who work closely with achievement directors, who are assigned to specific year groups. Pupils and staff alike report that the change is a positive one. Pupils feel better supported both in terms of their academic progress and their well-being.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The co-CEOs of the trust and trustees, after a period of readjustment and change, have shown a focused response to the inspection findings. Trustees have acted quickly to make the changes to leadership which were necessary to improve the school rapidly. In addition, trustees have not been afraid to seek the external support of another multi-academy trust in order to accelerate the pace of improvement.

The external review of governance has resulted in changes in the local governing body, which now has the skillset required to move the school forward and hold leaders to account effectively. Governors understand their role clearly and are well placed to drive through improvement. For example, the external review of pupil premium spending has prompted a more constructive dialogue between governors and school leaders about how best to spend the additional funding the school receives so that it impacts positively on those pupils who are disadvantaged.

The new principal joined the school at the start of the autumn term and, as such, the pace of change has already increased. Senior and curriculum leaders understand the need for urgency in having a positive impact on the progress pupils make, and on their behaviour and attendance. Leaders have an accurate and realistic view of where the school currently is and the challenges which remain. They do not underestimate these challenges but are determined to secure rapid change to move the school out of special measures in such a way that the positive changes made are sustainable and provide a secure foundation for further improvement.

Leaders are determined to promote an inclusive learning environment for all pupils, through a high quality of education and support. Leaders are considering how to work with pupils, parents and carers so that when it is time for pupils to choose subjects for further study, they have a wide range of options. Leaders are also determined to provide the appropriate guidance pupils need to choose the pathways which will serve them best in meeting their ambitions.

There is now a greater sense of teamwork and team spirit among the staff. Trust leaders are visible in the school, as are the principal and senior leaders. Governors, senior school leaders and staff across the school are working together to make the improvements required. Staff feel they are supported and benefit from professional development which focuses on their priorities. They believe the new principal and her team take their workload and well-being into consideration.

The school's statement of action is closely aligned to the school's improvement plan. After review of interim plans in the summer term of 2019, the improvement plan is now specific in action, has clarity in terms of success criteria and the timelines suggested are appropriate. The focus of the plans references closely to the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. In turn, the

recommendations for improvement support the actions which will be required to improve the quality of education and pupils' outcomes.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders have begun to develop key stage 3 curriculum plans so that pupils' learning is sensibly sequenced and builds on their prior learning. They have worked with primary schools to ensure key stage 2 learning is not repeated. Alongside these developments, leaders are introducing assessment strategies which identify gaps in essential learning which, in turn, will help pupils when they are provided with more challenging and complex tasks to complete.
- Improving literacy across all subjects is now high profile in the school. Each half-term, an aspect of literacy improvement is identified, which all staff are required to consider in their teaching and other responsibilities. Although there remain some inconsistencies in how effectively this approach is being applied, this is a positive step forward.
- Behaviour has improved because of the raised expectations school leaders and staff have of pupils. The behaviour management policy has been reviewed and is now consistently applied across the school. It is understood by pupils who say that behaviour has improved since the last inspection, with most improvement since September 2019.
- After a period of turbulence in terms of staffing, leaders are now confident that the current staffing profile is stable. Pupils report that their learning experiences are much improved since the beginning of the current term as a consequence of having permanent teachers and a consistency in teaching.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The work to improve the quality of education for pupils is in the early stages. This is particularly the case in key stage 4, where the order in which topics are taught in some subjects has not been thought about in enough detail.
- Although a new attendance team and strategy is in place, leaders have been slow to implement this since the last inspection. Consequently, improvements in attendance have not been as rapidly achieved as they might have been.

External support

The school has recently commissioned the support of another multi-academy trust. This support is in the very early stages. Planned support includes programmes of professional development and strategic support from trust leaders to facilitate the development of leadership and management and the quality of education.