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11 November 2019

Mr Jason Roberts  
John Smeaton Academy  
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LS15 8TA

Dear Mr Roberts

### **Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of John Smeaton Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 17 October 2019, 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 January 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy 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

Michele Costello

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in January 2019.**

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching, so that it is at least consistently good across all subjects and leads to improved outcomes, by:
  - giving high-quality support to the considerable number of new members of staff, particularly those new to the profession
  - continuing to focus on professional development so that all teachers enable pupils to make good or better progress
  - ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including those with the most complex needs, improve rapidly
  - developing the skills of teachers, including in the sixth form, to consolidate and deepen students' learning.
- Urgently improve the behaviour of a sizeable minority of pupils, ensuring that:
  - there is a sustained improvement in pupils' attendance
  - there is a further reduction in the number of fixed-term exclusions.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders, including governors, so that they can secure rapid and sustained improvement to teaching and outcomes for pupils by:
  - continuing to develop the skills of middle leaders so that all use the information from monitoring consistently to improve teaching, learning and assessment in their subjects
  - ensuring that the assessment arrangements for pupils in the complex learning difficulty provision are fit for purpose.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 17 October 2019**

### **Evidence**

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal and the executive principal. The inspector met with two representatives from the United Learning Trust (the trust). A meeting was held with the designated senior leader for child protection and the leader for behaviour. A meeting was also held with the school's attendance team. The inspector talked informally to pupils during lessons and breaktime. The inspector also met formally with a group of pupils from Years 9 and 11.

The inspector visited some lessons with the principal. During lesson visits the inspector scrutinised work in pupils' books. A meeting was held with a group of teachers and curriculum leaders. The inspector also met with some new staff.

The inspector reviewed the school's single central record, which includes the checks made on staff to ensure that they are safe to work with children.

### **Context**

Since the school was last inspected in January 2019, a new principal has been appointed. The head of school at the previous inspection is now the associate principal. Thirty-one staff have left the school and 20 new members of staff have been appointed. A new curriculum leader for modern foreign languages and a new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) have been appointed. The trust has seconded an assistant principal from another multi-academy trust to provide additional capacity.

There will be no students in the sixth form next academic year.

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

Since the previous inspection, support for teachers new to the profession has improved. There is now a weekly training programme. Those new to the profession meet their mentors regularly. Professional development for staff has focused on improving the quality of teaching. Staff are positive about the professional development they receive. However, they would appreciate more specific training in the subjects that they teach.

Curriculum leaders have received support from subject advisers from the trust to help to develop and improve the curriculum. There is further work to do to ensure that all key stage 3 curriculum plans cover the scope of the national curriculum.

Teachers plan opportunities for pupils to revisit previous learning, particularly in

English and mathematics. However, there remain gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding due to a legacy of poor teaching. Some teachers do not ensure that pupils have a secure understanding of what they have learned before moving on to the next topic or activity. They do not address pupils' misconceptions and gaps in their learning effectively enough so that they achieve well.

Leaders have introduced a revised behaviour policy since the previous inspection. Pupils understand the behaviour policy. However, during the monitoring inspection, both staff and pupils expressed ongoing concerns about pupils' behaviour. The behaviour of a sizeable minority of pupils continues to hamper the learning of others. Pupils say that disruption in some lessons is having a negative effect on their learning. Pupils told the inspector that they hear bad language regularly in school. Staff do not always feel supported to address pupils' poor behaviour.

While there was a reduction in fixed-term exclusions in the summer term last year, this trend has not been sustained. Fixed-term exclusions have increased since September 2019 and remain high, particularly in Year 9. The number of pupils removed from lessons due to poor behaviour remains too high. Leaders and the trust understand that improving pupils' behaviour remains a main priority.

There has been some improvement in pupils' attendance since the previous inspection. Leaders have introduced new systems and procedures to tackle the high rates of pupil absence. The attendance of pupils in Years 7 and 8 has improved. However, the attendance of pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11 remains too low. The absence rates of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) remain too high.

Provision for pupils with SEND is beginning to improve. The specialist area within the school for pupils with complex learning difficulties has been enhanced since the previous inspection. This is now a more welcoming and nurturing environment for pupils. A new SENCo is now in post. She understands the strengths and weakness of provision for pupils with SEND. Pupils with complex learning difficulties are now attending some mainstream lessons to develop their independence. However, there is still work to do to ensure that targets for pupils with education, health and care plans specifically address their needs so that these pupils are supported appropriately to achieve well.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management at the school**

A new principal was appointed in September 2019. He is aware of the weaknesses that need to be addressed. A revised school improvement plan is now in place. Measurable small steps have been outlined in the plan so that leaders can review the effect of actions taken. Staff understand the main priorities for improvement. However, the rate of improvement has not been swift enough since the previous inspection. There remains a substantial amount of work to do to ensure that weaknesses are tackled more effectively.

Following the previous inspection, a school improvement board was established to replace the governing body. Members of the school improvement board are aware that behaviour needs to urgently improve. A leader from the trust is working with the school to enhance provision for pupils with SEND. Provision for pupils with SEND is beginning to improve.

### **Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Since the previous inspection, curriculum leaders, working with subject advisers from the trust, have revised and developed subject curriculum plans. Curriculum leaders continue to develop the key stage 3 curriculum to ensure that the scope of the national curriculum is covered. For example, in history, leaders are developing curriculum plans further to include a local study.
- Leaders are ambitious for an increasing number of pupils to study the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). The number of pupils studying the EBacc has increased significantly in the last two years. In Year 10, 80% of pupils are studying the EBacc.

### **Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:**

- Leaders have not taken robust enough action to improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes towards their learning since the school was last inspected. Fixed-term exclusions, and the number of pupils removed from lessons due to poor behaviour and low-level disruption, remain too high. Pupils' behaviour continues to be a concern.
- The attendance of pupils in Years 7 and 8 has improved. However, attendance for pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11 remains too low. There has not been sustained improvement in pupils' attendance since the previous inspection. Low attendance has a detrimental effect on pupils' learning and progress.
- Gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding remain due to a legacy of poor teaching. Teachers are not routinely checking pupils' understanding so that misconceptions and gaps in pupils' learning can be addressed.

### **External support**

The trust provides support for the school. This support is helping to improve the curriculum and provision for pupils with SEND. However, this support has not led to rapid enough improvements in pupils' behaviour and attitudes since the previous inspection.

An assistant headteacher has been seconded from another multi-academy trust to the school's senior leadership team for four days per week. This is providing extra capacity within the senior leadership team.

