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23 May 2013

Mr Andy Cope
Headteacher
Armthorpe Academy
Mere Lane
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN3 2DA

Dear Mr Cope

Special measures monitoring inspection of Armthorpe Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 22 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. I would like to thank academy leaders, governors and representatives of the Consortium of Community Trusts for the time they made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and representatives of the Consortium of Community Trusts (CCT). The statement of action prepared by the CCT and the academy's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

The CCT is in the process of setting up an interim executive board made up of members from the CCT and governors from Armthorpe Academy.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

The statement of action, drawn up by the CCT, is clear and concise. It addresses all the areas for improvement identified by the inspection and provides well-spaced milestones against which progress can be measured. Targets are challenging but realistic. The academy's improvement plan builds securely on the statement of action by providing more detailed operational information. It is a well-used document that is regularly updated.

Arrangements for supporting Armthorpe Academy and evaluating impact are robust. Two other academies from the consortium are providing most of the support while representatives from the third academy are evaluating progress and providing regular reports to the trustees and the governing body/interim executive board.

The headteacher and senior leaders are driving improvements at a lively pace and there is early evidence of impact. Overall attendance, for example, has improved and the proportion of persistent absentees is reducing. The headteacher has worked hard to engage students, parents and staff in the drive for improvement. With this in mind, he chose the quality of written feedback as an early priority for development and already there is clear evidence of improvement. Action is now being taken to address any remaining poor practice.

Since the inspection, the academy has undertaken a thorough audit of teaching. This has provided a baseline from which to measure improvement plus detailed information about individual teachers' development needs which partners from the consortium are helping to address. Good practice in English and mathematics is being shared and there are plans to roll this out across other subjects. A leadership restructure to devolve more responsibility, clarify roles and rationalise middle leadership has begun and will be completed by September. Changes to governance are underway. The number of governors has been reduced and new members, from the consortium, are modelling best practice. The committee structure has been streamlined and further training is planned.

Other academies, within the consortium, are providing invaluable support at all levels. A very experienced headteacher is mentoring the headteacher; leaders from the other academies are providing bespoke support for senior and middle leaders; and teachers from across the consortium are sharing best practice. Ready access to specialist advice on human resource issues, available within the consortium, is especially helpful.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The Consortium of Community Trusts' statement of action is fit for purpose.

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The academy may appoint up to three newly qualified teachers subject to support being available from the Consortium of Community Trusts.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Consortium of Community Trusts. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jan Bennett

Her Majesty's Inspector