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4 October 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 with Tony Price, Additional Inspector, to your school on 2 and 3 October 2013, 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 which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint Newly Qualified Teachers subject to support being available from other academies in the Yorkshire Education Trust

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Doncaster and as below.

Yours sincerely

Jan Bennett

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2013

- Improve the quality of teaching throughout the academy and in all subjects, so that it is at least consistently good, accelerates progress and raises standards, by making sure that:
 - students know exactly what they are expected to learn in each lesson
 - tasks are closely matched to the levels students need to work at and ensure students of all abilities are well challenged
 - students respond in future work to advice given in marking that tells them what they have achieved and what their next steps in learning should be
 - staff have the highest expectations of the quality, quantity and presentation of students' work.

- Raise standards, especially in English and mathematics across Key Stages 3 and 4, so that students make at least good progress, by ensuring that:
 - consistently good or better teaching is established and sustained across the academy, starting with an audit of the strengths and areas for development in teaching
 - best practice in the teaching of English and mathematics is modelled for other staff.

- Secure students' good behaviour and attitudes towards learning through:
 - making sure that staff demonstrate the highest expectations of students' conduct.

- Improve students' attendance more rapidly through:
 - an overhaul of the attendance procedures
 - a greater emphasis on ensuring students and their parents understand the relationship between progress and attendance.

- Strengthen significantly the impact of leaders and managers at all levels on raising standards and accelerating students' progress by ensuring that:
 - all leaders have very clearly defined roles, responsibilities and accountability for raising standards, improving the quality of teaching and increasing the effectiveness of the curriculum in their areas, and report regularly to the senior leadership team the progress made
 - the headteacher and deputy headteacher check and assess very carefully the impact of the work of subject and year leaders on the academy's goals for improvement in order to keep the academy on track to improve the quality of education.

- Improve the quality of governance by making sure that the governing body:
 - develops systems and procedures that enable governors to check for themselves how well the academy is doing, so that they can support and challenge it more robustly.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 2 to 3 October 2013.

Evidence

Inspectors observed 21 lessons across a range of subjects, but especially mathematics and English, and undertook short visits to a further 11 lessons. Inspectors met with the headteacher, governors, representatives of the Yorkshire Education Trust, senior and middle leaders, teachers and students. Inspectors also scrutinised documents including those relating to school improvement, attendance and the progress made by students.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, an Executive Chair has been appointed to lead the governing body until the academy comes out of special measures. An interim deputy headteacher has also been appointed and the number of assistant headteachers has been reduced from four to one. Middle leadership has been restructured and three new faculty heads have been appointed. A quarter of the current teaching staff joined the academy at the start of this term.

The Consortium of Community Trusts is now known as the Yorkshire Education Trust.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Achievement in the lessons visited by inspectors was generally good. The vast majority of students are keen to learn and are beginning to take a proactive role in their own learning, especially in Year 7 and the sixth form where progress is accelerating. In Key Stage 4, however, some groups of students are too passive and the pace of learning is more limited. The system for tracking students' progress is robust. Teachers and leaders are able to identify underperformance, by individual students or specific groups, easily so that remedial action can be taken quickly.

Year 11 examination results were disappointing, especially in English and mathematics, but the proportion of students achieving at least five GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, increased slightly. A detailed analysis has been undertaken and strategies have been introduced to address the issues. It is too early to see the impact of the actions taken.

The quality of teaching

A large proportion of the teaching observed was good or better. Students are given clear information about what they are expected to learn in lessons. They are also given criteria for the different grades or levels so they know the standard at which they are working and how to improve. Expectations have been raised in the majority of lessons but there is a lack of aspiration and challenge where teaching is weakest. Most teachers plan a range of tasks to cater for differing abilities in the group and inspectors saw some outstanding practice but there are a few lessons in which the most-able students are not sufficiently challenged. In the best lessons, probing questions are used very skilfully to check understanding and extend thinking. However, questioning could be used more effectively in many lessons. Since the inspection, improving the quality of marking has been a key priority and the academy has been very successful in ensuring that the written feedback given to students is of a high standard across all subjects.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students report that behaviour has improved a great deal since the inspection. They say that the new behaviour system, which they helped to develop, is applied consistently and everyone is very clear about what is expected of them. Far fewer lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour and movement around the academy is very orderly. The number of fixed term exclusions is falling markedly.

Attendance continues to improve overall and the number of persistent absentees is reducing. However, the attendance of those students known to be eligible for free school meals is not improving as quickly as the rest. The academy is working hard to engage parents and ensure that they appreciate the importance of good attendance. An education welfare officer has been employed to improve communication with home and to work with poor attenders and their families.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher has a clear long-term vision for the academy and, supported by the trust and the governing body, has taken tough decisions in order to overhaul and strengthen senior and middle leadership. He is prepared to re-advertise key positions in order to appoint the right candidate, and Hall Cross Academy has provided invaluable support by seconding staff to fill the temporary gaps.

Senior leaders have a very good grasp of the challenges facing the academy. They know what needs to be done and are determined to bring about improvements. They are visible around the academy and accessible to students and staff. The new middle leadership team has a good blend of expertise and includes highly skilled and creative teachers. The team is already starting to gel and members are keen to take on extra responsibility in order to drive forward improvements. Lines of accountability are clear and a range of support is available for new leaders.

Changes to the governing body and the restructure of the sub-committees have led to more effective governance. Recent minutes show that governors have acquired the confidence and knowledge to ask very pertinent and challenging questions of senior leaders.

External support

The academy is receiving outstanding support from the Yorkshire Education Trust. Hall Cross Academy has seconded a number of key staff to strengthen leadership at Armthorpe. The Principal of Ossett Academy mentors and supports the headteacher and Horbury Academy monitors progress against the Armthorpe improvement plan. Consultants, employed by the Trust, provide bespoke training and some staff from the partner academies are giving informal support to their opposite numbers at Armthorpe.