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27 March 2014

Mrs Annette Hall
Executive Principal
The Leeds East Academy
South Parkway
Seacroft
Leeds
West Yorkshire
LS14 6TY

Dear Mrs Hall

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of The Leeds East Academy

Following my visit to your school on 25 and 26 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. 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 academy's most recent monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged as having serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in June 2013. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

The academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of Governors, the DfE Academies Advisers Unit and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Heather Richardson
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is always good or better in all parts of the academy, including the sixth form, by ensuring that:
 - inadequate teaching is rapidly dealt with and the proportion of good or better teaching continues to increase
 - all teachers have high expectations of students and use the information they have about their attainment to plan work that is challenging for all abilities
 - students are given clear, regular and helpful feedback on their work, and the level at which they are working, so they understand how to improve
 - all teachers expect the very best of students' behaviour and achievement in lessons and that they apply the academy's policy of sanctions and rewards consistently.

- Raise standards, especially in English, mathematics and science, by consistently setting and meeting targets based on students making at least three levels of progress between Years 7 and 11.

- Improve attendance in all year groups, including in the sixth form, so that it is at least in line with the national average.

- Ensure that leaders at all levels implement the academy's detailed improvement plans rigorously, and that middle leaders thoroughly monitor and evaluate the impact of their actions on students' outcomes.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 25 and 26 March 2014

Evidence

The inspector met with the executive principal and with senior and middle leaders responsible for a range of aspects of the academy's work. Meetings were also held with the Chair of Governors and with a group of students. A telephone discussion was held with the academy's improvement partner. Documents provided by the academy were scrutinised, as were samples of students' work. Short visits were made to 11 lessons, alongside members of the senior leadership team. The inspection focused on the progress made by the academy in relation to the areas for improvement identified in the inspection of June 2013, with the exception of the sixth form.

Context

There have been significant changes since the previous monitoring inspection. Four directors of learning joined the academy in January 2014, with oversight of English, mathematics, science and teaching and learning. These colleagues work across Leeds East and Leeds West Academies. A new head of science also joined the academy in 2014. After an unsettled time in the autumn term staffing is now more stable. The academy is now in the process of establishing new sponsorship arrangements, following the Department for Education's requirement that E-ACT should reduce the number of academies it runs.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

There are marked signs of improvement in the academy. Students, staff and governors recognise that this is primarily the result of the clear direction and the drive for improvement established by the executive principal, the head of school and the vice-principal. The improvements have been brought about by key strategic decisions made by senior leaders, together with the quality and rigour of systems and procedures which have been put in place. The academy's data on all aspects of its work are more robust and data are being used more widely and effectively than in the past to promote improvement. Senior leaders have high expectations of staff and students and apply high expectations to their own work. They are not complacent. They are prepared to seek out and learn from best practice in other schools and academies as well as being prepared to change any systems which are not working sufficiently well. The senior leaders have balanced the demands they make on staff with well targeted professional development and they themselves model good practice. As a result of their commitment and actions, the executive principal and her senior colleagues have secured much confidence from staff and students.

The academy's senior leaders have been well supported by the governing body. Governors are particularly well informed and hold the academy's leaders to account very effectively, not least through the raising achievement board which monitors the progress the academy has made since the inspection in June 2013.

There have been notable improvements in the capacity and quality of middle leaders. Although in post for a short time only, the directors of learning are making a demonstrable difference, not least through their support for those colleagues with direct subject

leadership responsibility. Lines of accountability are clear. The academy acknowledges that there is still too much variation in the effectiveness of middle leaders, but regular monitoring and challenge from line managers, together with improved data, mean that these inconsistencies are being reduced.

The most marked improvements so far have been in students' attendance and the reduced number of students who are persistently absent. These improvements have been brought about because of the determination of the senior leaders, and especially the vice-principal, to tackle the unacceptably high levels of absence and the impact of absence on students' achievement. There are now very clear systems and procedures in place to monitor attendance and to prompt firm actions. These systems are transparent and well understood. The academy has set out rewards as well as sanctions and has been creative in the range of strategies adopted to improve attendance. Data are analysed well and senior and middle leaders use this information effectively to target actions. Students recognise the very strong emphasis the academy now has on attendance. They know that the follow-up of any absence is swift but value this because they feel that it shows how teachers and other adults in the academy care about them. Students' behaviour is also improving as a consequence of well considered strategies and procedures. Again, students are well aware of the rewards and sanctions resulting from their behaviour.

The academy is also able to demonstrate improvement in students' achievement, although this is not yet as rapid or secure as it needs to be. For example, a higher proportion of students have gained GCSE English and mathematics at Grade C or above than was the case a year ago. The academy's forecasts show that this year's examination results should move from below to above the government's floor targets, which set out the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress. These forecasts are not speculative but are supported by more robust data and targeted interventions for individual students to maximise their potential. Similarly the academy's own data show that the rate of progress of Year 9 students has increased markedly, following two years of underachievement.

The improvements in students' achievement reflect the improving standard of teaching across the academy. There are examples of good teaching and innovative lessons which engage students and promote good learning. However, there is currently too much inconsistency in the quality of teaching, including teaching over time. Disruptions to staffing have prevented the academy from making the step change in teaching, but with more settled staffing and the impact of new appointments, the momentum for improvement is being re-established. Common systems, such as for marking, are promoting improvement but these are not currently sufficiently well used to provide the quality of feedback which enables students to learn most effectively.

The academy recognises, rightly, that it still has some way to go to secure improvement. Nevertheless, given its starting points, it has made significant progress. This has been in the context of considerable challenges, not least in the month preceding this monitoring inspection, with the withdrawal of the existing sponsor and the negotiation of new sponsorship arrangements. It is to the credit of all staff, and especially the executive principal, that it has been 'business as usual' for the students at a time when senior leaders and governors were dealing with major strategic issues.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The calibre of senior leaders, particularly the executive principal.

- High expectations from senior leaders combined with robust systems to translate ambition into action.
- Honest and robust appraisal of the academy's improvement by senior leaders and governors.

External support

In addition to attendance at the regular raising achievement board meetings, the academy sponsor provided financial support to create the director of learning posts initiated by the executive principal. The most significant external support, and that valued highly by the academy's senior leaders, has come from the academy's improvement partner. This has been well informed and has, by its rigour and challenge, complemented the work of the senior leaders and governors in promoting improvement and ensuring accountability. The academy continues to benefit from local partnership arrangements, and especially the close work with its partner, Leeds West Academy.