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Mr Mike Westerdale
Executive Principal
Trent Valley Academy
Sweyn Lane
Off Corringham Road
Gainsborough
DN21 1PB

Dear Mr Westerdale

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Trent Valley Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 26–27 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 previous monitoring inspection.

This was the second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in May 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 the Governing Body, the Director of Children’s Services for Lincolnshire.

Yours sincerely

David Rzeznik
Additional Inspector

Annex

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

- Ensure that no teaching is inadequate and that more is good or better by:
 - making sure that the work set for students is always sufficiently challenging and pitched at the right level so that students, including those who have special educational needs, achieve their potential
 - improve the quality of teachers' marking so that it consistently gives students clear guidance about how well they are doing and how they can improve
 - ensuring that all teachers ask probing questions to develop and extend students' knowledge and skills.

- Raise attainment and accelerate rates of progress for all groups of students, especially in mathematics by:
 - reducing the gaps in attainment and progress between different groups of students so they all achieve well
 - developing more effective ways of intervening in the learning of younger students so they gain the basic skills and knowledge to allow them to succeed from Year 9 onwards.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - strengthening the academy's capacity to bring about change rapidly by making sure leaders challenge underperformance and ensure that teaching is good or better
 - refining and embedding recently introduced systems to monitor students' progress, set targets and tackle underachievement
 - ensuring the behaviour management systems are used effectively by all staff in order to improve standards of behaviour throughout the academy
 - ensuring that the curriculum meets the needs of all students.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 26–27 March 2014.

Evidence

The inspection concentrated on evaluating the extent of improvement in addressing the serious weaknesses identified in May 2013.

The inspector met with the Executive Principal, Head of School, Vice-Principal, Associate Vice-Principal, Associate Principal and some Assistant Vice-Principals, subject leaders for English and mathematics, the Year 8 pastoral team, the human resources manager, current and former Chairs of the Governing Body and two sponsor representatives.

The inspector observed five lessons, and saw teaching and learning in all years. A personal and social education session, organised by an outside provider, was also seen. All of the lessons were conducted with senior leaders. A sample of English, mathematics and humanities work from Years 7, 9 and 11 was evaluated. A discussion was held with a group of students to seek their views about academy life and behaviour. A range of documentation was evaluated, including the academy's attainment and progress information, governing body meeting minutes, attendance data, monitoring and evaluation records and reports produced by external consultants and advisers. The single central register was checked to ensure that the weaknesses identified in May 2013 had been remedied effectively.

Context

There have been significant staffing changes since September 2013. The Executive Principal, Head of School, Finance Director, Head of Modern Foreign Languages, a Vice-Principal, two Assistant Vice-Principals and an Associate Vice-Principal joined the academy in September 2013. Fourteen teachers left in July 2013 and 15 new teachers were appointed in September 2013. Five teachers are newly qualified and six are part of the Teach First and Schools Direct programmes.

The sponsor is E-ACT. Its Board of Trustees agreed on 26 February 2014, that Trent Valley academy will no longer be part of the sponsor's group of schools. This is because the sponsor is reducing the number of schools that it holds responsibility for. The decision to change sponsor has been agreed with the Department for Education. A preferred sponsor has been chosen. The date of conversion to a new sponsor is unknown.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The Executive Principal and Head of School are doing a good job. They are working closely with governors and other senior leaders to drive improvement quickly. The rate of improvement has accelerated since September 2013, when the new senior leadership team was established. Tough decisions have had to be taken to eradicate

inadequate teaching and underperforming leadership in English, mathematics and science. New subject leaders for mathematics and science are making the necessary changes to improve teaching and learning in both subjects. As a result, standards are starting to rise, in both subjects, and students' progress is accelerating, albeit from a low base. English leadership has improved because of the successful interventions made by senior leaders. English teachers are working more closely together than in the past and expectations regarding subject outcomes are higher. Better teaching and improved programmes of study in English are leading to rising standards in the subject, particularly in Year 11.

There has been a significant change in the expectations and aspirations set for the academy. Senior leaders, teachers and students are committed to the vision and ambition set by the Executive Principal, Head of School and governors. The quality of education is improving at a good rate. Good practice is being maintained and weak teaching and ineffective leadership are being addressed effectively. Students say that the academy is a different place since September 2013. They welcome the significant improvements to teaching and behaviour and say that the reputation of the academy is much better. Students think that the academy is moving in the right direction and report that the atmosphere within the academy has markedly improved. Consequently, they are happier and feel more safe and secure.

The academy improvement plan and the rapid recovery plans produced for English and mathematics are of good quality. Effective action is being taken to raise standards, by improving teaching in all years and the quality of leadership at all levels. For example, underperforming teachers and leaders are given appropriate support and guidance to improve. Inspection evidence indicates that support packages have been effective in improving teaching or leadership in individual cases where required. Capability procedures are used when necessary. Subject leaders are being empowered to improve teaching and learning, with good support from senior leaders. They are given the freedom to do what is best to raise standards. The development of subject and year group leaders is given high priority, supporting effective succession planning for the future.

The monitoring and evaluation of the academy's work is coherent and systematic. Consequently, senior leaders, subject leaders and governors know the academy's main strengths and weaknesses. In September 2013, senior leaders rightly put in place robust procedures to ensure that teachers' judgements about the standards achieved are accurate. At the same time, effective measures were adopted to ensure judgements made about teaching and learning are secure. For example, all teachers undertaking observations in classrooms have been suitably trained to make fair and accurate judgements about teaching and its impact. Curriculum changes have raised standards. For example, appropriate action has been taken to ensure that, unlike last year, Year 11 students following physics, biology and chemistry courses are capable of benefitting from them.

Governors are providing a clear strategic direction and are effectively holding senior leaders to account for the academy's performance. Their work is appropriately focused on the key priorities in the academy improvement plan. For example, governors meet monthly, with sponsor representatives and senior leaders, to judge the extent of progress in addressing the key priorities in the improvement plan. In advance of such meetings, an external adviser is used to verify the amount of progress made on each key priority and the extent to which milestones are met, to ensure senior leaders' evaluation of progress is fair and accurate.

In May 2013, the single central register did not always specify the name of the person undertaking recruitment and staff vetting checks. The academy was not robust enough in ensuring that overseas criminal record checks were undertaken on all foreign nationals. All weaknesses have been rectified.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teaching and learning are improving and standards are starting to rise in English, mathematics and science, particularly in Year 11. The proportion of students making expected progress and more than expected progress, in English, mathematics and science, is significantly higher than in 2013. Teaching is better and more demanding and interesting activities are provided for students. Inadequate teaching has been significantly reduced. Those teachers whose teaching is not good enough are appropriately supported and guided to improve.
- Good intervention work in Year 11 is reducing the gaps in attainment and progress between different groups of students, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Behaviour and students' attitudes to learning are much improved. Students' conduct is good in classrooms. It was also good during lesson changeovers and in the canteen. Students engage purposefully with teachers in lessons, persevere with tasks and are keen to achieve the lesson objectives set.
- Many teachers have formed good relationships with students and there is a very positive learning atmosphere in classrooms. Students' say that in most lessons learning is not disrupted.
- Work is mostly pitched at the right level of difficulty and activities are suitably demanding. Teachers observed had the required subject knowledge to teach concepts securely and most students made at least adequate or better gains in their learning.
- Teachers' questioning has improved. Teachers are asking appropriate questions to check students' understanding of concepts and to consolidate and extend their learning.

- Marking has improved. Teachers regularly mark books and targets are usually set for further improvement. Regular checks are made by senior leaders to ensure that the new marking policy is being consistently implemented.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The tracking of students' progress is not robust enough. The tracking of the progress made by different groups of students each academic year, and over time, is not sharp enough.
- The expected outcomes set for students in Years 7, 8 and 9 are not ambitious enough.
- Attendance is too low, particularly in Years 9 and 10. Persistent absence is too high. The strategies used to bring about improvement are not fully effective.
- Students' speaking skills are underdeveloped. Too many individuals lack confidence when speaking aloud and have difficulty speaking in coherent sentences or in using a range of vocabulary. Teachers' questioning does not generally lead to students articulating their ideas in a fluent way or encourage them enough to express their differing viewpoints.
- Not enough practical equipment is used to support learning in mathematics.
- The presentation of work in books is too variable. Weaknesses in spelling and punctuation are not being rectified quickly enough. Most students are not writing in a fluent joined style.

External support

The sponsor made two very good appointments when they recruited the Executive Principal and Head of School to drive improvement more quickly. Both leaders are suitably experienced and have the required leadership skills to rapidly improve the quality of education provided. External consultants have been used wisely to undertake audits in subjects and areas of the school that are underperforming. The audits have pinpointed what is working well and what must be improved. Targeted action has brought about improvements in teaching and leadership in weak areas. Good use has been made of external advisers to seek students' and learning leaders' views about academy life. Areas for improvement have been identified and are being addressed. A sponsor representative keeps a close eye on the extent of progress being made in rectifying the key weaknesses identified in the May 2013 inspection report. Good links have been established with another E-ACT school and good practice seen elsewhere is being adopted in Trent Valley. The sponsor is ensuring that there is a smooth transfer to the academy's new sponsor.