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12 May 2014

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 8 and 9 May 2014, 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the academy 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 academy 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.

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 and the Interim Director Children and Young People's Service for Doncaster.

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 fourth monitoring inspection on 8 to 9 May 2014.

Evidence

I observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, students and a representative from Yorkshire Education Trust. I also observed four lessons, made short visits to a further 14 lessons and visited the isolation unit. I focused on three areas for improvement at this visit: behaviour; the quality of teaching; and the impact of leadership.

Context

A new head of science and deputy heads of mathematics and science have taken up post since the last visit. Four teachers have left the academy and two have returned from maternity leave.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Year 11 examination results are expected to be much better this summer. Forecasts are based on practise tests and assessments that have been standardised by specialist staff from other academies in the trust. The standard of work produced indicates that a much higher proportion of Year 11 students have made the progress expected since joining the academy. Students' achievement is also improving lower down the school but there are concerns about the achievement of some Year 10 students. The academy is already working on strategies to improve achievement, attitudes to learning and attendance in Year 10.

The quality of teaching

The quality and pace of learning have improved since the last monitoring inspection as a result of better behaviour and improvements in teaching. The quality of teaching is monitored well and leaders have an accurate view of its effectiveness. Support packages for weaker teachers are effective in many cases, and the latest push to increase the proportion of outstanding teaching is already having an impact. Most teachers are using a wide range of activities to meet students' needs and capture and maintain their interest. In some lessons, for example, students work hard, contribute to animated discussions, and work well together. These lessons move at a lively pace. There is a minority of lessons, however, where the level of work is inappropriate or the pace is ill judged. There is still variation in the frequency and quality of marking.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is much improved. Students, teachers and leaders all agree that behaviour in lessons has improved considerably since the last monitoring visit. Data showing the number of 'call outs' and exclusions show that the new strategies are effective. Visits to lessons during the inspection also provided evidence of improvement. Leaders and teachers have worked very effectively together to pinpoint key concerns and to develop effective strategies to address them. Non-cooperation and defiance were identified as major problems for teachers and the new 'reasonable instruction' policy has gone a long way to addressing their concerns. Assemblies have been used well to ensure that students appreciate the need for good behaviour. Other initiatives such as dispersing senior leaders' offices across the site, high visibility jackets for duty staff and leaders welcoming students at the gate every morning have also contributed to the improvements. Students' behaviour out of lessons continues to be calm and orderly.

Attendance is much higher than at the same time last year and the number of persistent absentees is markedly reduced. Year 10 attendance is still low but the involvement of senior leaders in home visits is proving effective in reducing persistent absence.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leadership at all levels is becoming stronger. Senior leaders are sharply focused on the core issues and are prioritising effectively while at the same time coping with a high staff turnover and other operational challenges. Senior leaders are more skilled at assessing the impact of new strategies and are driving improvements increasingly well. The successful push to improve behaviour demonstrates an increasing capacity and confidence. Staffing is beginning to stabilise and a number of new teachers and senior leaders are set to join the academy between now and September. Recently appointed middle leaders are growing into their roles and the middle leadership team is becoming increasingly effective, confident and positive.

External support

The academy continues to receive excellent support from Hall Cross Academy that is very well judged and reflects the improvements at Armthorpe. Hall Cross is now covering gaps when key administrative staff leave or providing emergency technical support rather than loaning staff long term to shore up senior and middle leadership. The other academies in the trust also provide very good support, and a recent joint training day for staff, both teaching and non-teaching staff from all four academies, shared expertise and developed informal support networks across the trust.