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Dr Gillian Metcalfe
Principal
The Freeston Academy
Favell Avenue
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Wakefield
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Dear Dr Metcalfe

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of The Freeston Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 24 April 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help your staff gave during the inspection and for the time they made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses in January 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting Principal, deputy Principal, other senior and middle leaders, the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body as well as a trustee governor, the chief executive officer and a senior director of the Wakefield City Academies Trust (WACT). A learning walk to a number of Key Stage 3 lessons was conducted with a deputy Principal and groups of students were spoken to informally at break and lunchtime. The academy's statement of action and action plans were evaluated.

Context

The Principal is absent long term due to ill health. Four teachers left the academy at the end of the spring term and two joined at the beginning of the summer term. There is currently a large number of supply teachers covering vacancies, maternity leaves and sickness absences. It has been agreed that the academy will join the

Wakefield City Academies Trust, with which it has been working for some time under a memorandum of understanding, from September 2015.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Last term the governing body spent some time considering carefully the choice of a sponsor for Freeston. Governors have agreed that the academy should join the WCAT and in doing so build on a relationship that is already well established with a proven track record of success. In the meantime, the governing body agreed an increased level of support from WCAT so that work towards improvements could get underway promptly. Since the decision to join WCAT has been made, the level of support from the future sponsor has increased considerably. Support at senior leadership level is either in place or due to start very soon for behaviour, teaching and learning, assessment, curriculum development and leadership. This is a welcome enhancement to the academy's leadership capacity, the result of which is already becoming evident in some areas.

A combination of the Principal's absence and deliberations about the choice of sponsor resulted in the production of two action plans which, taken together, are not entirely coherent. Links between actions and targets are not always fully apparent and there is some confusion between the recording of steps taken and the evaluation of the impact of these. In places, responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the impact of developments rests with the same person. Nonetheless, shortfalls in the planning have not hampered senior leaders in making a start on the improvements required.

Working with the sponsor, a new system for recording and analysing behaviour incidents has been adopted and is currently being trialled. This has the potential rapidly to provide leaders with a fine-grained picture of patterns of behaviour. Initially, it is being used to establish a baseline from which to set targets, plan actions and measure changes. Staff spoken to who are involved in the trials are positive about the reduction in paperwork and the way in which responses to incidents can be tracked electronically with ease. Other developments underway are a major change to the academy's pastoral organisation, planned for the next academic year and intended to facilitate sharper tracking of all aspects of students' achievement. The rationale for a new type of inclusion room has been agreed so this is being prepared and staff are being recruited to manage it.

During the learning walk, which formed part of this monitoring inspection, students' behaviour in lessons was making a positive contribution to their learning. Tasks were suitably challenging and higher attaining students in particular showed a keen enthusiasm to succeed, for instance in programming the actions of a robot or in working out the probability involved in tossing a coin a number of times. All students spoken to were clear about the academy's policy on the use of mobile phones and said that this is now being implemented consistently. At social times students behaved sensibly, making the best of the limited space available.

A new system for analysing information about students' achievement has been introduced. This is welcomed by staff since it obviates the need for lots of manual calculations, is user friendly and speedily provides more refined analyses. These are helping in the regular reviews of the performance of Key Stage 3 students. Importantly, this system is readily highlighting the performance of disadvantaged students and has the potential to facilitate a better-targeted approach to closing the gap between the performance of this group and others. Middle leaders welcome the improved access to analyses of students' performance because this increases their capacity to quality assure the work of their department. There are clearer expectations of middle leaders, with tighter use of departmental meeting time and more formal minuting of discussions and decisions.

Senior leaders have used analyses of the academy's data as the foundation for some key decisions designed to improve the performance of disadvantaged students. In the next academic year these students will be placed in one of the academy's populations so that they can be taught by teachers with a proven track record of success with this group. Tighter transition arrangements for Year 6 pupils have been made with primary schools to ensure that better information is received ahead of time so that students' needs can be planned for and met without delay.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The academy's action plans are not fit for purpose. Senior leaders, governors and the future sponsor are well aware of this and steps to make the necessary changes are in hand.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Corporate Director, Children and Young People for Wakefield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector