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9 February 2015

Mr Marc Doyle
Headteacher
South Leeds Academy
Old Run Road
Leeds
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Dear Mr Doyle

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to South Leeds Academy, Leeds

Following my visit to your school on Friday 6 February 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and the sponsor are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- Sharpen improvement planning so that precise steps and timescales for implementing all actions are clear and can be regularly and carefully monitored to judge the impact on students' progress.
- Ensure the proposals from the review of the provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs are rapidly progressed.
- Make sure that there is a consistent approach to improvement across all subject areas by subject leaders, particularly in relation to marking and feedback and promotion of literacy.

- Set aspirational and achievable targets for student attainment and progress that motivate students, drive improvement planning and provide clear goals for staff and students.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with the Principal, several senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Regional Director, who is also a National Leader of Education (NLE), to discuss actions taken since the last inspection. I spoke to students, senior and middle leaders about their work and I scrutinised action plans and monitoring records of teaching. I also considered attendance and progress data. I visited 8 lessons, examined students' books and folders with a number of leaders.

Context

Since the last inspection visit, a number of teachers have left the academy and new leaders have been appointed. There are two new Vice Principals, as well as a new Assistant and Associate Assistant Principal. The leadership team has been restructured and extended. There are currently three vacancies in English, Maths and Science that the Trust is supporting the recruitment of teachers for September.

Main findings

There is a collective ambition and energy that permeates the academy. However, the academy's leaders are pragmatic enough to recognise the scale of the task they face to raise achievement and get the school to good. Leadership has been reorganised and distributed more widely and leaders say they feel empowered to drive improvement. The Principal and other senior leaders are responding positively to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection and have raised staff expectations and morale. The Principal is developing a strong team ethos and this is having an energising effect on his team. There are a significant number of leaders who are new to their roles and they have been working together with the Principal on the vision and expectations the team will share in order to drive future improvements.

Governors visit the school on a regular calendared basis and have a good understanding of the improvements needed to ensure that all students leave the academy with the best possible prospects for their future. The Governing body has been strengthened by the appointment of new governors, with a wealth of educational experience, and the Principal is drawing on this expertise to question and support his newly formed Senior Team.

Changes to the way data is captured, then presented to staff, is helping subject leaders to identify trends within and across subjects. More frequent monitoring of teaching by middle leaders is giving a clear indication of the quality of teaching and programmes of training and support for staff are in place. Students at the academy make significantly less progress than all students nationally given their starting

points and the gap between disadvantaged and other students in terms of expected and more than expected progress is high. Therefore students' target grades need to be more closely monitored and regularly reviewed, particularly where students have not joined the academy with prior attainment data. Students need to work to appropriate aspirational target grades in all subject areas and staff need to plan using these targets in order to provide appropriate challenge to students of all abilities. Whole-school targets are presently not based on an accurate analysis of individual student data and senior leaders need this clarity in order to plan interventions and monitor the impact of measures to ensure good student progress across all groups.

Leaders are ambitious in what they want to introduce. New leaders are planning strategies for improving students' levels of literacy across all subjects but as yet these have not been introduced across the academy. Similarly, leaders are planning new systems for assessing, monitoring, evaluating and supporting disabled students and those with special educational needs and are aware of the need for extensive staff training and additional expertise before these ambitious changes are introduced. A new curriculum is being worked on to secure better student engagement and levels of progress and staff are being consulted on more rigorous performance management procedures designed to promote improved student outcomes. The improvement plan now needs to capture these developments, prioritising and ordering actions and precisely detailing the staff training required. It also needs to have measurable success criteria and milestones for each main area for improvement.

Leaders' focus on the quality of marking and feedback is paying dividends in some areas. Students spoken with reported on the recent changes which have improved their learning. These included receiving more regular and detailed feedback about their work and having opportunities to respond in reflection time. However, there is still inconsistent practice both within and across departments and leaders must tackle this if all students are to receive the quality feedback they need to progress.

Students who spoke with me were complimentary about the academy and feel that there are higher expectations. Students say they like the increased emphasis on rewards and particularly value the opportunities to peer and self-assess and rewrite their work following teacher and peer feedback.

External support

The Regional Director of Education from SPTA visits the academy regularly and has a clear understanding of the challenges faced. Members of staff visit other academies within the SPTA group and this is enabling them to observe outstanding practice elsewhere. The Principal is working with schools and academies outside the group and with the LA. A number of consultants are engaged to provide an external view of the school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Leeds and as below.

Yours sincerely

Chris Abbott

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- For academies [CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk]
- For free schools, UTCs and studio schools [open.FREESCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk]
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school is a non-maintained special school [hns.efa@education.gsi.gov.uk]