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14 May 2015

Mrs Carol Kitson  
Executive Principal  
Lightcliffe Academy  
Stoney Lane  
Lightcliffe  
West Yorkshire  
HX3 8TL

Dear Mrs Kitson

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Lightcliffe Academy**

Following my visit with Janet Pruchniewicz and Andrew Williams, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 12 and 13 May 2015, 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 third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 2014. 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.
- The academy may appoint newly qualified teachers in English, physical education, religious education and science.

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 Lead Member of the Advisory Group and the Director: Children and Young People's Services for Calderdale.

Yours sincerely

Michael Maddison  
**Associate Inspector**

Appointed as an Associate Inspector under the powers relating to additional inspectors, in paragraph 11 of Part 2 of Schedule V2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in May 2014**

- Improve the quality of teaching, including in the sixth form, so that it is at least consistently good and enables all students to achieve well, by ensuring that all teachers:
  - use accurate performance information to plan and set work that matches the needs and abilities of students more closely, especially those with special educational needs
  - have high expectations of what all students can achieve, especially boys, those supported by the pupil premium funding and the most able students
  - mark students' books regularly in order to provide them with the advice they need to improve their work and learning and that they require their students to act on this advice
  - focus on helping students to practise and improve their literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects that they study.
  
- Swiftly improve students' behaviour and safety, including their attendance, by developing effective practices to:
  - reduce the numbers of students who are regularly absent from school, particularly those supported by pupil premium funding and those with special educational needs
  - reduce the number of students who are late for school especially those in Key Stage 4
  - ensure improving poor behaviour is given the highest priority.
  
- Rapidly improve the impact of leaders and managers, including governance, by ensuring:
  - there is a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching and students' achievement
  - inadequate teaching is eradicated and that which requires improvement is improved
  - that governors hold leaders and managers rigorously to account for students' achievement particularly in English, mathematics, science and geography and for their behaviour and safety across the school
  - pupil premium funding is used effectively to improve the achievement, behaviour and attendance of those students supported by the funding.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Ofsted will make recommendations on governance to the authority responsible for the school.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 May 2015**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work and met with the executive Principal, the consultant operational lead, the Lead Governor of the Advisory Board and one other governor, senior leaders, subject leaders and individual teaching and support staff. They visited 25 full and part lessons, of which three were joint observations with senior leaders, attended an assembly and visited two tutorial sessions. They spoke informally to many students, as well as having formal meetings with students representing Years 7, 9 and 10.

Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including: information about the current achievement of students at each of the key stages; the raising attainment plan and the most recent commentary on that plan; performance management information; details of the training programme for staff; minutes of the meetings of the advisory board; behaviour and attendance data; a range of policies including that for child protection; and the most recent plans for supporting disadvantaged students for whom the academy receives additional funding. They scrutinised students' work while they were in classrooms.

### **Context**

Since the last monitoring inspection there has been a considerable number of staff resignations. Most will take effect from the end of the summer term but those of the former headteacher and the director of finance took effect during the spring term. At the end of this term, most members of the senior leadership team will leave the academy. They will be replaced in September by a new Principal and vice-Principal both of whom have already been appointed. So far over 20 new teaching staff, including senior and middle leaders, have been recruited for September 2015.

On 1 March Hipperholme and Lightcliffe High School completed the process of converting to an academy under the sponsorship of the Abbey Multi Academy Trust (Abbey MAT). Hipperholme and Lightcliffe High School has since been renamed as Lightcliffe Academy. The executive Principal of the trust is now responsible for strategic leadership at the academy. Operational leadership for the rest of this academic year will be the responsibility of a former headteacher who has been appointed as the consultant operational lead.

With the academy joining the Abbey MAT, the governing body has been dissolved. It has been replaced by an advisory group, led by the Chair of the Abbey MAT Board of Directors. Currently it comprises two former members of Hipperholme and Lightcliffe's governing body and two members from the Abbey MAT Board. Plans are in place to widen the membership to include two additional individuals from the community.

## **Achievement of pupils at the academy**

There is increasing evidence to indicate that achievement is improving. The most recent assessments of students' performance suggest that achievement will rise this summer at GCSE, that more students will gain at least five subjects at grades A\* to C and that more students will make at least expected progress in either English or mathematics or both subjects. This is due to raised expectations of students and improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. However, not all students are yet making the progress of which they are capable. This is particularly the case in relation to the most able students because they are not being sufficiently stretched and challenged in their work.

The achievement of disadvantaged students is still a cause for serious concern. This is because they are not making sufficient progress in their work. The academy reports that the gaps between students who are disadvantaged and those in the academy who are not disadvantaged are beginning to narrow. The same appears to be the case when the performance of those who are disadvantaged is compared to the national picture for similar students. These improvements are due to the fact that senior leaders have revised their plans and are more acutely focused on using the additional funding they receive to raise the achievement of these students as a matter of urgency so that disadvantaged students achieve their potential. Senior leaders acknowledge, though, that there is still much more to do.

In recent years achievement in the sixth form has been too variable from year to year and between subjects. Throughout this year the academy has focused on improving achievement in both academic and vocational subjects. Current estimates of performance for 2015 suggest that achievement will improve for both A level and BTEC courses. This is due to improved teaching and learning in the sixth form, raised expectations for all students and a much closer monitoring of students' progress. The 'four weeks to get it right' programme in Years 12 and 13 to help students make appropriate progress, for example, has led to improvements in effort and achievement. As a result, it is successfully helping more students to accommodate and respond to the demands of sixth form study.

The tracking of students' progress across the academy has been streamlined with a much greater focus on the use of data rather than collection followed by preparation for the next collection of data. As a result, academy leaders are becoming more adept at identifying students in need of intervention and the type of intervention those students require. The challenge for senior leaders now is to ensure that all staff use the performance data available when they plan learning so that lessons begin from students' respective starting points. Some staff are doing this effectively but practice is inconsistent. In addition, some students are unclear about their targets so that, although they might be aware of what they need to do to improve, they are unsure what they are aiming for. Senior leaders acknowledge that there is work to be done on ensuring that all students understand their targets.

Inspection evidence from lesson observations indicates that students' rates of progress are improving. More teachers have higher expectations and ensure that there is an appropriate level of challenge for all students. Nevertheless, this is not the norm in all classrooms across the whole academy. In some lessons, students are given work which does not extend sufficiently their knowledge, understanding and skills. In these lessons, students do not make enough progress in their learning.

### **The quality of teaching**

Students' progress is increasing because the quality of teaching is improving. While there are still some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching within and across subjects, the focus upon eradicating inadequate teaching and reducing the proportion of teaching which requires improvement is having some success. Use of students' performance data to inform planning for learning is becoming more widespread. Revisions to the lesson planning process mean that teachers are obliged to focus more on what they need to do to ensure students make progress rather than producing a series of activities. However, this is not yet embedded across the academy. The programme of staff training, a greater emphasis upon sharing best practice and enhanced performance management processes are increasingly creating a more open culture in which staff are responsive to and engaging in discussion and debate about how to improve their practice. Senior leaders are aware though that this is very much 'work in progress'.

The marking of students' work and the feedback they receive are improving. Regular scrutiny of students' work is enabling leaders to evaluate the quality of marking and feedback more effectively. Inspectors agree with the academy's analysis that the impact of the 'what went well' and 'even better if' approach on students' learning is 'patchy'. Some staff use the 'even better if' strategy well by identifying specific targets to which students can immediately respond by undertaking an additional or corrective task. However, too many targets set are far too generic for them to have the impact desired on students' learning. Senior leaders are acutely aware of the importance of strengthening marking and feedback to bring about lasting improvements in students' learning and progress.

The focus on developing students' communication skills is receiving a much higher profile than it has in the last year. Staff are clear about the importance of this work and the subject-specific communications mats offer the opportunity for staff to develop students' literacy skills throughout their lessons. The work to improve students' oracy skills is a key part of this initiative. Some staff provide a range of opportunities for students to develop their oral explanations. However, too many staff accept short answers with colloquial words and phrases. As a result, they miss opportunities to enhance students' progress in how they phrase their ideas in a formal way for both discussion and subsequent written work. Whereas the work to improve students' literacy is well underway, that to develop their numeracy skills across all subjects is in its infancy. Plans are in place to take this work forward in the next academic year.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Overall, attendance is improving and there have been marked reductions in the proportion of students who are persistent absentees. This is because the range of strategies which the academy has employed in recent months is having a gradual but sustained impact on those whose attendance is a cause for concern. However, the attendance of disadvantaged students has remained substantially the same, while that for students who are disabled or who have special educational needs has deteriorated. In addition, whole academy attendance is still below the national average. The punctuality each day of students in Years 10 and 11 has improved considerably but there is still much more to do in the sixth form and to a lesser extent in Years 7, 8 and 9. The academy is rightly challenging those students who are less than prompt each morning and tardy in their movement around the building between lessons. Attendance rewards, and highlighting the importance of regular attendance and punctuality in tutorial time and assemblies, are helping to raise awareness of the impact of absence on learning. Senior leaders are working hard to improve attendance and punctuality. They acknowledge that improving the quality of teaching and developing the content of tutor time are important factors in improving students' attendance and encouraging them to arrive at the academy and lessons on time.

Students report that behaviour continues to improve and that more staff have higher expectations of them. However, they also noted that the behaviour management system is still applied inconsistently by some teachers. As a result, in these lessons their learning is still interrupted and their progress slowed. Behaviour between lessons is improving but the congested nature of corridors means that at times there is some boisterous behaviour as students move between classrooms. Although staff with a classroom base are expected to 'meet and greet' students on their arrival at lessons, inspectors observed times when this requirement was not being met as unequivocally as senior leaders expect. An explicit focus on being ready for work and wearing the correct uniform each day has helped to raise expectations. Younger students commented that they liked this approach. The number of students who have had to be reprimanded for not meeting the new guidelines has risen but this is to be explained by the raising of the bar as to what is and is not acceptable. Academy leaders are explicit in their approach and are rightly expecting students to conform to clear behaviour expectations. It will take some time, though, for these requirements to become fully entrenched across all year groups.

## **The quality of leadership in and management of the academy**

It is pleasing to be able to record that the much awaited and long overdue restructuring of senior leadership roles is well underway and that a much leaner, and hopefully more highly effective senior leadership team, will be in place in September. As a result, the academy is currently undergoing an unprecedented period of

change. Nevertheless, the work of the consultant operational lead has been focused throughout this period of change upon ensuring that the academy provides an improved quality of education and care for all students. Her dedication, commitment and perseverance have helped to galvanise staff who are very supportive of what she and the senior leaders are trying to achieve. Staff morale is high. They appreciate the support of staff from Abbey MAT and that the sponsored status of the academy has been finally settled. They welcome the clarity of message from senior leaders, the streamlining of procedures and practices, and the emphasis upon high quality teaching and learning every lesson every day. In return, they acknowledge the importance of their own accountability.

Senior leaders have continued to focus on implementing the raising attainment plan and to help ensure that the academy will soon be removed from special measures. Students' performance is closely monitored and the regular termly performance tracking points allow leaders and managers to highlight those who are in danger of falling behind and to put in place appropriate support. Senior leaders regularly observe the quality of teaching and joint observations undertaken with the inspection team indicate that they have a clear view of what contributes to highly effective teaching and learning. Teachers continue to hone their skills through a range of activities which provide focused professional development for all staff. Policies are being reviewed and brought up to date so that they meet the needs of the academy and its students. Overall, actions across all the areas for improvement are being undertaken but their impact so far remains variable.

Governance is rapidly improving and the newly created advisory group has clarity of purpose. Its members understand the seriousness of the situation facing the academy and are determined that it emerges from special measures as soon as is feasible. They display high levels of commitment and are becoming more knowledgeable through the improved quality of the reports they are starting to receive from senior leaders. The minutes of their initial meetings reveal a focused business-like approach to the issues which they discuss, precision in their proceedings and perception in their comments. They are rightly focused at this time on key strategic issues including finance, employment and recruitment, and achievement. Since its inception the lead member, who is also Chair of the Abbey MAT, has approached the considerable issues with which she and her fellow members are faced with sensitivity and a steely determination. Together, they recognise the strengths of Lightcliffe Academy and that Abbey MAT can learn from the academy. However, they are under no illusion as to the significance of the issues at the academy. Members of the advisory group are ambitious but they acknowledge that the work of the Abbey MAT at Lightcliffe is in an embryonic phase. Moreover, they recognise that the academy needs time for new policies and procedures to embed and for the full impact of current initiatives to be evident in improved standards of education and care.

## **External support**

Since the last monitoring visit, the academy has continued to receive a high level of support from Abbey MAT. The executive Principal has given much time to the needs of the academy and been particularly focused on essential strategic issues, notably around leadership structures, finance and staffing. Various members of staff from Abbey MAT have spent time at Lightcliffe Academy supporting senior and middle leaders and classroom teachers in advancing the improvement agenda. In addition, some of the new teaching staff who will join the academy in September, for example the new director of post 16 and new achievement director for English, have been recruited from Abbey Grange Church of England Academy. The commitment of the executive Principal, her senior leaders and her staff from Abbey MAT, and their support and guidance, continues to be much valued by staff at the academy.