

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



13 November 2015

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

Dear Mrs Kitson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Lightcliffe Academy

Following my visit with Mike Maddison and Judith Gooding, Ofsted Inspectors, to your academy on 4 and 5 November 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 fourth 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

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 academy.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 4 and 5 November 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Executive Principal, the Principal, vice-principal and other members of the senior leadership team, members of staff, the Lead Member of the Advisory Group and two other governors, and groups of students. Inspectors visited 34 part-lessons, of which around half were jointly observed with senior leaders. Inspectors also visited an assembly, some form periods and observed students' behaviour and attitudes at social times. Informal discussions were held with students and students' books were scrutinised when inspectors visited lessons.

Inspectors took account of a range of documentation, including the academy's analysis of achievement, current tracking data, the academy's plans for improvement and leaders' evaluation of progress since the last monitoring inspection. In addition, inspectors considered the training and support plans for teachers, checks made on the use of pupil premium funding (additional funding for disadvantaged students), attendance and behaviour information, the minutes of advisory board meetings and safeguarding checks made on members of staff.

Context

There have been considerable changes to staffing since the last monitoring inspection. A new senior leadership team has been established, including a new Principal, vice-principal and assistant principals. Only two members of the former senior leadership team remain. An extended leadership team has also been created consisting of nine posts focused on the tracking of achievement and the quality of teaching and learning. A new pastoral team has been created. Leaders are currently reviewing the structure of support staff. At the end of last term, 29 teachers left and, in September, 32 new teachers joined the academy.

Some new governors have been recruited to the advisory board. Efforts to recruit further governors are continuing. Links with Abbey Multi Academy Trust have been strengthened. The Executive Principal of the trust continues to provide ongoing strategic leadership. In addition there are five lead practitioners from Abbey Grange Church of England Academy supporting senior and middle leaders.

From September, the academy changed the timings of the academy day so that there are now five one-hour lessons each day. Five 'non-timetable' days have been added to the curriculum for the teaching of students' personal, social and health education.

Outcomes for pupils

Standards of achievement at GCSE did not improve last summer, as had been anticipated. The new leadership team recognise that this was because the quality of teaching was inconsistent and tracking of students' attainment was inaccurate and overly generous. Attainment at the key measure of five or more GCSE A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, remained static and well below the 2014 national average. Too many students failed to gain a GCSE grade C or better in both English and mathematics, limiting their ability to move on to the next stage of education, employment or training.

Disappointingly, the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged students and other students in the academy widened at GCSE. The new leadership team is looking again at the use of additional funding and setting up better systems to monitor its impact. They recognise that this is an urgent priority. This year, some of the additional funding has been used to support the appointment of achievement directors. They have begun to track the progress of disadvantaged students more carefully and are beginning to put in place better support and mentoring for those disadvantaged students making slower progress. However, leaders' strategy for the use of additional funding for Year 7 students who enter the academy below national expectations is less well developed. There is limited support in place for these students and leaders do not know if it helps students to catch up. Members of the advisory board are not content with the way additional funding has been used in the past and are challenging leaders to demonstrate it has a positive impact.

In 2015, Year 11 students made similar progress in English and mathematics to the previous Year 11 cohort. Rates of progress in English and mathematics, therefore, remained broadly static and well below national averages.

However, for students currently in the academy, there are signs that progress rates are improving. Recent assessments, which leaders have greater confidence in, indicate that students in the current Year 11 are on track to attain better outcomes in 2016. Although leaders do not have any tracking data available, as yet, for students in Key Stage 3, observations of lessons indicate that students are making better progress in lessons. The picture remains inconsistent, however, as students still make slower progress in some subjects, particularly science, history and geography.

In 2015, outcomes in the sixth form also remained static. The new sixth form leaders have quickly reviewed the quality of provision and are clear about what needs to improve. There is a heightened focus on the quality and consistency of teaching. However, it is too early to gauge the impact of current actions to raise attainment in the sixth form.

The new leadership team is acutely aware of the need to raise levels of achievement across subjects and key stages. A key priority is for leaders to improve the accuracy and reliability of tracking data, so that they have a detailed picture of students' progress within different subjects and across each key stage. This will allow them to precisely target their efforts to tackle underachievement.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The profile of teaching in the academy has changed significantly since the last monitoring visit. Approximately one third of teachers are new to the academy. All new teachers have received a comprehensive induction programme and training that has stressed the need to set high expectations, to challenge students' learning and behaviour and to provide good-quality marking and feedback. Leaders have carried out lesson observations of all teachers new to the academy. As a result, they have a clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. This shows that inadequate teaching has been almost completely eradicated. Where teachers have been identified as requiring improvement, there are good support arrangements in place. Lead practitioners are working with colleagues to improve their practice and, where subject leadership is stronger, these inconsistencies are being tackled effectively. For example, the subject leader in mathematics has worked effectively with colleagues to review the quality of their marking and feedback and shared the best practice within the department. However, student progress remains a cause for concern in particular in science, history and geography, where inconsistencies in practice are yet to be addressed.

In September, the academy put in place a new policy for marking and feedback. Leaders are just completing their first check on the impact of this policy. Inspection evidence shows that not all teachers are complying with the policy's requirements. In some departments, marking is not happening regularly enough. In some books sampled, teachers' comments are not specific enough to promote further thinking and only lead to a cursory response from the student. However, there is some good practice emerging which leaders now need to capture and promote.

Teachers are becoming more adept at using the information they have on students' prior attainment to plan lessons. Inspectors observed some lessons in which the work provided had been adapted to ensure students of different abilities were suitably challenged. Because of this, they made better progress. However, in other lessons, students were not clear how to improve their work and did not know how to reach their targets. In these lessons, students were engaged and busy, but made little progress because they settled for easier options.

The support provided by some teaching assistants is ineffective because they are not deployed and directed effectively by teachers and are not given sufficient responsibility. Some teaching assistants are uncertain as to their role. Senior leaders accept that more needs to be done to raise their profile, particularly because their

employment represents a significant proportion of the additional funding provided for disadvantaged students.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The restructure of the pastoral team and the changes made to the academy day are already having a positive impact. This is because members of the new pastoral team do not have a teaching commitment and consequently can address behaviour, safeguarding and attendance issues quickly. Already this term, overall attendance has improved, compared to the same period last year, and is now above the 2014 national average. Most pleasingly, the targeted work to improve the attendance of disadvantaged students is working well and their attendance is improving more rapidly than that of other groups. As a result, fewer students are regularly absent and have improved chances of attaining the qualifications they need to move to the next stage of education, employment or training.

In addition, there have been fewer recorded incidents of disruptive behaviour. The new behaviour policy introduced from the start of term is widely understood by students. They feel the policy is applied fairly and consistently by teachers and has led to a better climate for learning across the academy. There have been no permanent exclusions and fewer fixed-term exclusions so far this year.

Senior leaders and other members of staff consistently encourage good punctuality and challenge students who are late for the start of the day. This is helping to improve punctuality. In addition, the changes made to the academy day now require students to be in first lesson by 8.40am, which has helped further. However, during the day, some students amble in corridors and arrive late, disrupting the start to some lessons.

From September, the curriculum has been enriched by the introduction of five 'non-timetable' days across the year through which students will learn about personal, social, health and careers education. The planning for this aspect of the curriculum is, as yet, in its infancy and the leader with responsibility for its development has limited time to do what is necessary. Nevertheless, this change represents a step forward to support the personal development and well-being of students. Leaders are exploring how the topics explored through this new curriculum can be further developed and reinforced through form-time and assemblies.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Following a period of unprecedented change, the new senior leadership team, which consists largely of leaders new to the academy, has made a promising start. Each member of the senior team has precise responsibilities for which they are clearly accountable. Within the seven weeks the team has been in place, it has assessed the challenges the academy faces and has put in place an appropriate plan for its

improvement. Senior leaders are ambitious and impatient to increase the pace of change. All were disappointed with the examination results from the summer and are determined to secure a rapid improvement in outcomes for students.

The arrival of the new leadership team marks an important turning point for the academy. Members of staff unanimously recognise the culture and climate in the academy has changed. The approach of senior leaders is more consultative and transparent. In particular, members of staff appreciate the clear sense of direction and feel changes that are being made are meaningful and sensible. Teachers commented that they feel increasingly listened to and are more involved in key decisions. As a result, morale is high.

An extended leadership team has been established which is helping to share leadership responsibilities more widely. For example, the appointment of achievement directors means there are more staff involved in checking on students' progress and on the quality of teaching.

Members of the advisory board are increasingly proactive and work strategically to monitor the academy's progress. They meet regularly and receive detailed and evaluative reports on specific areas of the academy's work. Minutes of advisory board meetings show that they work in a business-like and professional manner. Consequently, members of the advisory board have a good understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses and are systematically holding senior leaders accountable. Furthermore, they have also begun to hold middle leaders directly accountable. For example, they will require subject leaders of underperforming subjects to attend meetings and present their plans for scrutiny. Members of the advisory board are not content with the way pupil premium money has been spent and the poor impact it has had. They also acknowledge that more needs to be done to ensure catch-up funding for Year 7 students is used effectively. However, with only six members currently, the board has limited capacity to ensure thorough scrutiny of all aspects of the academy's work. As such, the recruitment of additional members with appropriate skills and experience remains a priority.

The leadership of the sixth form has strengthened. The new sixth form leader has reviewed the quality of teaching already and has identified the key issues to strengthen the sixth form. Leaders are reviewing the sixth form provision more widely to ensure it meets the requirements of the 16–19 study programme.

External support

Support from the Abbey Multi Academy Trust has been crucial in accelerating improvements in the academy. The Executive Principal has provided highly effective strategic guidance through a period of rapid change and has been highly effective in recruiting new members of staff. Her work to recruit and establish a new leadership

team, to form an extended leadership team and to restructure the pastoral team marks a turning point for the academy.

Lead practitioners from within the trust are providing effective support to key areas such as the English and mathematics departments and the sixth form. They are having a positive impact on work to improve the quality of teaching. For example, they are providing good-quality support for all teachers identified as requiring improvement.