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Mrs K Wakefield
Headteacher
Havercroft Academy
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Dear Mrs Wakefield

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Havercroft Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 4 December 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and the trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good academy.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior and middle leaders, pupils, representatives from the interim executive committee and the Regional Director for the Wakefield City Academies Trust (WCAT) to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Together we observed lessons and I evaluated samples of pupils' work in their books. Documents, including those concerned with pupils' safety, behaviour and attendance, were considered.

Context

A new headteacher took up post in September 2015. Two teachers are currently absent long-term due to ill health.

Main findings

You have made a brisk start on the improvements needed and set high expectations for staff and pupils. You are providing firm direction and have established clearly the roles and responsibilities of leaders at all levels. This has had a positive impact on staff morale: staff say they know what is expected and welcome the support they receive to make improvements.

Supported by WCAT staff, you have drawn up a good strategic plan for this year. Deadlines for completing actions and reaching challenging targets are set out. Helpfully, the plan separates who is responsible for actions, monitoring their implementation and evaluating their impact. Progress is tracked carefully to ensure that the planned pace of improvement is maintained. Subject leaders for English and mathematics are developing subject plans to underpin the overarching development plan. Support from senior leaders and the WCAT team is helping them grow their skills as leaders. The subject leader for mathematics and staff have also benefited from training aimed at increasing their mathematical knowledge and understanding.

You have introduced an assessment system linked to the demands of the new National Curriculum. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of this. However, opportunities are planned for teachers to compare their judgements with those of staff in school and from other schools in WCAT. This is particularly important in writing where results of the Key Stage 2 assessments in 2015 were out of kilter with pupils' performance in other subjects. The introduction of the new National Curriculum is providing the opportunity to plan learning that is more exciting and engaging for pupils. For example, all aspects of teaching literacy are based around a key text. In lessons visited, it was clear that pupils are enthused by the books chosen: Year 2 pupils were very keen to write a diary entry for *The Lonely Beast*.

Through regular monitoring, leaders have a realistic view of the quality of teaching across the academy. Training for all teachers and individually tailored coaching by WCAT staff are underway to bring about the improvements needed. Some benefits of this were evident in the lessons observed, for example:

- the high levels of pupils' enthusiasm and application to the tasks in hand
- the determined efforts they were making to use cursive script and present work as neatly as possible.

However, in all lessons and in books pupils' weak spelling skills were evident. Teachers do not always model grammar accurately in their spoken English. In some lessons the level of challenge was insufficient.

You have raised the bar for pupils' behaviour. Pupils spoken to say there is a more consistent approach to behaviour management. They know what is expected and the sanctions that will be applied if they fall short of expectations. The academy's records show an improvement in behaviour overall, although there has been a high number of fixed-term exclusions this term linked to difficulties experienced by a very small number of boys. Pupils say they feel safe in school and that bullying is not a problem. Presentations by the local police officer during anti-bullying week helped them understand the nature of bullying and the difference between this and falling out with friends.

You have introduced an innovative approach to making long-lasting improvements to pupils' behaviour. The challenge club runs each afternoon for a small group of vulnerable pupils from across the academy. They work together, supported by skilled adults, following the curriculum in imaginative ways. There is strong emphasis on developing their confidence, social skills and ability to manage their own behaviour. Leaders' tracking shows a positive impact on the initial cohort who followed this programme in the first part of this term. There are helpful plans to track the impact over a longer period.

There has been a small improvement in attendance this term, although persistent absence is above average. In part, this is because families moving out of the area are experiencing difficulties finding school places elsewhere. Staff know the reasons for pupils' persistent absence and work closely with families and external agencies to reduce this.

The academy is moving from a joint governing body, shared with a local primary school, to a discrete governing body planned to start in January 2016. At present WCAT holds direct responsibility for governance and has interim arrangements for decision making in place.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

WCAT is dedicating considerable resource to supporting the academy and the new headteacher. A central focus is improving teaching and learning, including help in meeting the needs of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs. The introduction of the new approach to literacy teaching has been a significant part of the work this term. This is beginning to pay dividends. Staff recognise the expertise that WCAT brings and value the support they receive.

The headteacher has also engaged the support of consultants beyond WCAT where beneficial. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of much of this training and support.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive committee, the Wakefield City Academies Trust 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