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Zoe House
Acting headteacher
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Dear Ms House,

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Lees Brook Community School

Following my visit to your academy on 29 January 2016, 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 second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement, identified at the recent section 5 inspection, in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the Chair of the Governing Body and subject leaders to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I met with the senior school improvement adviser for Derby Local Authority, and with a group of teachers selected at random, to discuss morale amongst staff and their views of leadership and management. I also spoke with a group of Year 10 pupils. I reviewed the academy's action plan and self-evaluation documents and records relating to the monitoring of teaching and staff training. In addition, I looked at information relating to attendance, exclusions and the progress of current pupils. The results of a recent staff survey were taken into account, as were a pupil survey and 56 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. I made short visits to lessons in English,

science, languages, humanities and mathematics. Pupils' behaviour at break- and lunchtime was observed.

Context

Four teachers left the academy at the end of the summer term in 2015. You have appointed new heads of faculty in both the science and languages departments, two new teachers in humanities, two new mathematics teachers and new teachers in English, drama and modern foreign languages. There are currently two members of staff on long-term leave of absence through illness.

Main findings

The actions taken by leaders and governors have not yet been effective at moving the academy towards good. However, the foundation stones have been put in place. Since the previous monitoring visit, you have wasted no time in addressing the key priorities for improvement. Rightly, your first priority was to ensure a stable staffing and improve the quality of teaching. You have greatly reduced the proportion of supply teachers in the academy. Teachers are clear about the academy's priorities for improvement, and their role in raising standards.

In accelerating the rate of improvement, you have maintained the morale of staff. Those I spoke with were resoundingly confident about the current leadership of the academy. They told me how much they value your support, and the openness and transparency of current leaders. As one stated, 'Morale has improved beyond belief. I enjoy coming into work and no longer feel as though I am walking on egg shells.'

Staff are motivated and keen to ensure that pupils succeed because they understand the reasons behind the decisions you have taken. Their views were echoed by pupils who told me that you always have their best interests at heart and listen to their views.

The actions you have taken to improve teaching are beginning to bear fruit. Teachers are clear about the non-negotiables that you expect of them. They have become more adept at focusing on the achievement of groups of pupils, because they are being held to account more rigorously. They have a better understanding of how to use data about pupils' prior attainment to ensure that work is set at the right level. The 'open door' policy means that teachers are becoming more used to being observed and receiving feedback from both leaders and their peers. They welcome such feedback and are not afraid to seek out the necessary support to improve their practice when needed.

Professional development for teachers is more closely focused on their needs and on whole-school priorities. For example, you have identified that teachers' predictions for pupils' achievement were not always accurate. You have created opportunities for staff to work together to standardise the marking of assessments. Subject

leaders attend local authority network meetings where they standardise work with colleagues from other schools. These actions are resulting in greater confidence in teachers' predictions for pupils' outcomes.

You have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy. These are informed, for example, by the regular learning walks and book scrutinies that you and other leaders carry out, as well as by the regular pupil voice and staff surveys you have conducted. You welcome this feedback, because you understand the importance of listening to staff and pupils, and ensuring that their views are taken into account.

You have revised the curriculum to ensure that it best meets the needs of pupils and enables them to succeed on their courses. For example, you have improved the options system to ensure that pupils are guided to more appropriate pathways at Key Stage 4, and have ensured that all pupils now sit two-year GCSE courses. This is leading to improved outcomes, because pupils are better able to develop the skills and knowledge that they need to achieve their true potential.

Middle leaders are becoming more effective in their roles. They are becoming more skilled at holding teachers in their departments to account for the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils make. They have a clear understanding that achievement will not rise until teaching is consistently good, in every lesson, for every pupil. They ensure that teachers in their departments keep a close focus on the achievement of groups of pupils, including those supported by the pupil premium and the most able.

There is now a more robust and more consistent approach to performance management. Teachers are set more challenging targets and these targets are now more closely linked to the whole-school priorities. As a consequence, the high expectations you have of staff are becoming more widely established, and the whole academy has a greater clarity of purpose.

Outcomes for pupils in 2015 were not as strong as you had hoped, in part because of the inaccuracy of some teachers' predictions. There was a slight decrease in the proportion achieving five A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils fell further behind their peers in English and mathematics. Achievement in languages, science and humanities shows that pupils underachieved in these subjects, too. There is more to do to ensure that teaching is consistently good in all subjects. You are now working more closely with your feeder primary schools so that information about pupils is shared and the correct support put in place. There is more to do to ensure that all pupils get off to the best possible start and make consistently good progress throughout Key Stages 3 and 4.

There are some encouraging signs, however, in the latest information about pupils' achievement. You are predicting that a higher proportion will make the expected, and more than expected, progress in English and mathematics. The support

activities you have put in place for disadvantaged pupils are paying dividends; you are predicting that gaps in their achievement, compared to that of other pupils, will decrease this year.

You have done much to improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. Following a review of behaviour that highlighted some safety concerns, you took immediate action to ensure that the site was secure. You have devised new systems to ensure that pupils move around the academy safely. This has had a positive impact on pupils' behaviour. The introduction of a new behaviour policy has seen an increase in the number of incidents reported and the proportion of pupils who are excluded from the academy on a fixed-term basis is not reducing. There is more to do to ensure that these pupils' experience of school is consistently positive, and that the curriculum fully meets their needs. In the lessons we visited, most pupils displayed positive attitudes to learning and relationships with teachers appeared good. Pupils we spoke with said that some of their lessons continue to be interrupted by low level disruption and they do not feel that all teachers manage behaviour consistently well in the classroom.

Governors do not have a sufficiently strategic overview of the academy or a clear vision for its improvement. Since the previous monitoring visit, a review of governance was carried out in order to see how this aspect of leadership and management could be improved. This led to some improvements to governance. For example, new protocols were drawn up for governors' visits to the academy and an induction pack was devised for new governors. However, governors' involvement in the academy is focused on operational matters. While the Chair of the Governing Body meets with you on a weekly basis to discuss the action plan, governors do not carry out any formal evaluation of the actions that are being taken. They are aware that some departments do not perform as well as others, but do not have a clear view of which actions are successfully moving the academy forward, or of the potential barriers to the academy being judged good at its next inspection. Governors have not fulfilled their statutory duties to ensure that the academy's policies, practices and training comply with the latest legislation. This must be addressed with urgency.

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

You continue to access some support from the local authority. This resulted in a review of the science department in the autumn term that also focused on behaviour and safety. The senior adviser I spoke with told me how swiftly you responded to these findings. Links with other schools are being explored but are at an early stage.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Derby Local Authority.

Yours sincerely

Deirdre Duignan
Her Majesty's Inspector