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Dr T Quincey
Principal
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Dear Dr Quincey

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Red House Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 6 April 2017, 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 April 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in April 2016, the academy was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders, governors and the Northern Education 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.

The academy should take further action to:

- further develop the skills of middle leaders so that they can all provide effective support and challenge for colleagues and intervene effectively where pupils fall behind their targets
- ensure that disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities across key stages 3 and 4 make progress in line with that

made by other pupils in the academy

- ensure that teachers consistently provide work that challenges pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the principal and other senior leaders, the chair and other members of the board of governors, the academy achievement partner and a representative of the Northern Education Trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited a number of lessons with a senior leader to gather evidence about the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment and I sampled a number of pupils' books to look at the quality of their work. I also met with a group of pupils to discuss their views on the quality of education that they receive. I evaluated the academy's plans for improvement and scrutinised a number of other documents including the record of security checks on staff, assessment information, some policies, records of checks on the quality of teaching, performance management information and minutes of governing board meetings.

Context

Since the academy was last inspected, the principal has decided that she will retire at the end of the summer term. The governors and the Northern Education Trust have appointed a new principal who will take up post in September 2017. Most members of the mathematics department were new to the academy in September 2016. There are fewer temporary teachers now teaching in the academy than at the time of the previous inspection.

Main findings

The senior leadership team, governors and representatives of the Northern Education Trust all know that the pace of improvement needs to be rapid and sustained if the academy is to be judged to be good in its next inspection. You are all committed and determined to ensure that the necessary improvements are made and have detailed plans in place to promote improvement. Together you review the impact of your actions every month by measuring the academy's progress against a broad range of measures. The rigour of this system has ensured that the governors are well informed about the progress being made and have effective systems in place to hold senior leaders fully to account.

Each member of the leadership team knows their responsibilities well and is providing effective leadership. Together they have raised expectations through, for example, the setting of more challenging targets for pupils' progress and by setting more stretching objectives for each teacher. Leaders have also implemented a coherent assessment system and check the progress being made by different groups and individual pupils across their different subjects. Senior leaders now use this information more systematically to hold middle leaders to account and to target additional support for those pupils who fall behind. Although their scrutiny of assessment information initially focused on key stage 4, they have recently extended this approach to encompass assessment information gathered for pupils in key stage 3. The impact of this can be seen in the more rapid progress that pupils currently in the academy have begun to make.

The principal knows that leaders cannot afford any complacency. Examination results in 2016 were disappointing and showed that pupils continued to make significantly weaker progress across a broad range of subjects than seen nationally. Outcomes were below the government's floor standard. Pupils made significantly less progress than they should in English, mathematics and science. However, there were some green shoots. The proportion of pupils attaining a good GCSE grade in both English and mathematics rose from 28% in 2015 to 37% in 2016 and a higher proportion of pupils attained the English Baccalaureate.

The actions that leaders took to strengthen the leadership of English and mathematics are now paying dividends. Both subject leaders have improved schemes of work and are providing effective guidance and support to departmental colleagues. Further changes to staffing in mathematics have improved the quality of teaching and accelerated pupils' progress in the subject. The pupils who I spoke to were clear about the difference that this had made to both their learning and their attitude and desire to be successful. However, not all middle leaders are having the same positive impact and leaders know there is more work to do to develop their skills. A number of departments still need to 'up their game' and cannot afford to allow pupils to fall behind the targets that leaders have set.

The training and guidance that leaders have provided to improve the quality of

teaching is having a positive impact. Teachers now mark pupils' work regularly in line with the school's policy and manage the behaviour of pupils well so that classrooms are calm and purposeful. A more systematic approach to supporting good literacy and numeracy in all subjects has been introduced. Temporary teachers receive better support and participate fully in staff training. Most teachers use questioning effectively to check pupils' understanding, although in some of the lessons that I visited, teachers did not clearly identify pupils' misconceptions or take steps to address them. In some other lessons, the work provided did not stretch or challenge some pupils sufficiently. Senior leaders make regular checks on the quality of teaching and have a detailed knowledge of where teaching is most effective and where it needs to improve. The extra support that they have arranged for some teachers has helped them to sharpen their practice.

Until recently, the senior leadership team has concentrated much of its monitoring and additional support programmes at pupils in key stage 4 because it knows that there is much to do to overcome a legacy of poor teaching and staff turbulence from the past. It has more recently begun to extend the scope of its checks to include key stage 3, in recognition that it cannot afford to let pupils fall behind. New meetings have been introduced to hold middle leaders to account for the progress of younger pupils. This broadening of approach reflects the principal's determination to tackle underachievement wherever it lies in the academy. This now needs to be sustained so that leaders deliver on the challenging targets that they have set themselves.

Current assessment information indicates that outcomes in 2017 examinations are on course to sustain the improvement seen last year. However, the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils remain well below that of other pupils nationally and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not making the progress that they should. Leaders have learned lessons from the external review of the school's use of the pupil premium and have sharpened their strategy accordingly. The impact of this additional funding is now being checked more systematically and every effort is being made to support those pupils who are performing below expectations.

The governors have a good understanding of the school's position and know that they must play a crucial role in sustaining the pace of improvement. The introduction of a monitoring committee is proving to be an effective forum for checking on the academy's progress and to challenge senior leaders. Governors draw upon the expertise within the Northern Education Trust effectively to support their scrutiny and have undertaken training that has strengthened their grasp of published performance information. They make good use of the academy's plans for improvement to chart the way forward and are well placed to ask searching questions when they visit.

External support

The Northern Education Trust is providing effective support and challenge, which is helping the academy to move forwards.

The trust delivered a thorough review of performance last autumn that has informed the academy's detailed plans for improvement. In addition, the trust's achievement partner is providing effective strategic support and developing the capacity of governors through his chairing of the monitoring committee. Middle leaders are benefiting from the ongoing support of subject directors and the opportunity to attend network meetings with colleagues from other trust academies.

The trust has also provided additional funding to support improvement activities, although their plan for the use of this funding lacks rigorous success criteria that would improve their ability to measure its impact.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector