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Mr R Hewitt
Headteacher
West Hill School
Thompson Cross
Stalybridge
Cheshire
SK15 1LX

Dear Mr Hewitt

Special measures monitoring inspection of West Hill School

Following my visit to your academy on 2 April 2014, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since West Hill School became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, the two deputy headteachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, and a representative of the local authority. The academy's action plan was evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection in December 2013, one teacher has left and a governor has resigned. A new head of the English department took up post in January. The head of history is absent. The Department for Education is working with the governing body to identify an appropriate local sponsor.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Governors, senior leaders and staff have accepted the outcome of the inspection in December 2013. They refer to a 'new energy' and a shared determination to move forward quickly; both are evident in the considerable action taken in the first three months to clarify expectations, to introduce new procedures and to provide professional development and support. You have informed parents of your intentions, acted on students' views in drawing up a new classroom code, and sought advice from other schools and agencies in how to strengthen governance and ensure that the action plan is fit for purpose. You have given responsibility to the two deputy headteachers to drive improvement in achievement and in teaching and learning. They have a growing body of evidence from the monitoring of teaching activities and from reviewing students' progress to enable you to refine targets and actions for the summer and following terms.

The action plan is only for the period January to July 2014. It is steering current action and reflects all the aspects identified for improvement in the inspection of December 2013. However, given the stated intention for the academy's overall effectiveness to be good by December 2015, the plan lacks a clear line of intent over the rest of the two-year period. Similarly, there is little to show how the impact of action is to be evaluated. In drawing up the plan for action after July 2014, it is important that you, governors and staff outline priorities over the next five terms, sharpen targets and identify clearly who will evaluate the effectiveness of the action taken, when this will occur and the evidence required.

Key steps forward have been first, clarifying lines of accountability, second, specifying your expectations of heads of department and teachers regarding the progress of students and third, introducing a six-week cycle in tracking and reviewing students' attainment and progress. The most recent data indicates that students in Year 11 are on track to meet the set targets, but this is an able cohort yet to show high achievement. The data also points to inconsistencies in progress by differing groups of students within and between year groups and subjects. Students with special educational needs are not faring as well as others, but are making up ground when involved in 'catch-up' sessions. It is an opportune time to review critically the provision for these students, especially given the recent view of students that often the content and activities in lessons are the same for all, irrespective of ability. Observations of teaching are appropriately focussing on the impact of teaching on learning, and you are gathering evidence from other teaching activities, including the scrutiny of students' work, teachers' use of marking and students' responses, to give a rounded profile of individuals' teaching over time. You have rightly considered widening the range of observations, including unannounced

visits to classrooms, particularly to evaluate how well ideas and strategies identified in training sessions are being consistently applied.

There are clear signs that the governing body is holding the academy more sharply to account. The Chair was prompt in commissioning external consultants to advise on how best to strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of governance. Following an audit of governors' skills and expertise, the work of the governing body has been restructured with a Strategic Group (Leadership and Management) having prime responsibility for monitoring the academy's progress. Members of this group have attended meetings with senior leaders and questioned them about the implications of data from the tracking of students' progress. Two governors have also accepted specific roles, namely, to oversee training for governors and to facilitate the development of governance, and others are working with heads of department to oversee progress in English, mathematics, science and geography. This approach increases considerably the governing body's capacity to review critically the academy's effectiveness. All governors have had training in how to interpret the data published in RAISE online and individual governors are following bespoke training plans. Governors are also actively looking to ways to secure the appointment of experienced, strong teachers and managers to strengthen departments, especially mathematics.

Overall, the governing body, senior leaders and middle leaders are now much better placed to pinpoint exactly where the weaknesses in teaching and achievement lie.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The governing body's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The current action plan is fit for purpose but, at the time of the inspection, no plan for the months after July 2014 was available.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint NQTs, but I recommend that no NQT is appointed to teach mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Department for Education - Academies Advisers' Unit, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Tameside and as below. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sonja Øyen

Her Majesty's Inspector