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Miss S Ramsden
Principal
The Blyth Academy
Chase Farm Drive
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Dear Miss Ramsden

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Blyth Academy, Blyth, Northumberland

Following my visit to your academy on the 16 October with Claire Brown HMI, 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 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, governors and the academy sponsor, Northern Education Trust, are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- Identify clear actions to engage with parents and carers, especially those who have been traditionally hard to reach, by:
 - sharing the work of the academy, its successes and areas for development
 - seeking their views about the different ways the academy can communicate with them even more effectively.
- Ensure that the role of governors is made more explicit throughout the academy development plan, so that their work contributes to, and accurately reflects, the improvements in the academy's progress.
- Update and amend the academy development plan at those times when there is important and relevant information about the academy's progress against each of the identified priorities and actions.

Evidence

During this inspection, Claire Brown and I met with you and other senior leaders of the academy, the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body and two Northern Education Trust officers. I evaluated the academy's development plan, self-evaluation, and the most recent minutes of governing body and senior leadership team meetings. Claire and I also walked round the academy site and spoke with a small number of students and staff.

Context

Since the previous inspection, 20 teaching and 17 support staff have left the academy. There is now an entirely new senior leadership team, including you as the Principal, and two seconded staff, both of whom are linked directly with Northern Education Trust. All middle leaders have either been re-appointed from their previous post or are new to the academy; this includes a new head of the 16 to 19 study programmes. The new appointments include seven trainee teachers.

Main findings

The Blyth Academy has gone through a series of recent changes to its leadership and teaching staff. Almost all of these changes started just prior to and from the beginning of September, so evidence of improvement is, at this time, limited. However, senior leaders, staff, governors and trust officers collectively agree that the higher expectations of staff for a more consistent and improved standard of behaviour by students is evident throughout the academy. Certainly, the inspectors would not demur from the view that the academy is calm, and that the students seen during the visit behaved sensibly and safely.

The Principal has drafted an academy development plan, which covers five key improvement areas. This plan serves to highlight how the academy will tackle areas of underperformance and improve the outcomes for all students, especially those who are disadvantaged in some way. Leaders at all levels are confident that this plan will focus attention on the most important actions and so help the academy to improve. It can also be used by governors and trust officers to challenge and support senior leaders. However, there are parts of this plan which need sharpening in order to achieve the aim of greater accountability. For example, the important and varied roles of governors in monitoring all aspects of the academy's provision. Additionally, there are no identified actions on how leaders will communicate regularly with parents and carers on the improvements being made across all areas; this latter aspect was an area for improvement in the previous inspection report. Further, the latest version of the plan has yet to take full account of recent governor notes of visits to the academy, and all aspects of the most recent 2015 GCSE results, particularly where recent faculty reviews have identified specific subject-related

actions that need to be carried out as a matter of urgency. Regular updating is an essential element in ensuring that all leaders, especially governors and Northern Education Trust officers, know that the academy is making progress in a timely way.

The staff confirm that they are now expected to be accountable for the quality of their own teaching and, if a middle manager, for the staff in their subject faculty or area of responsibility. As a consequence, all staff are aspiring to improve the quality of their teaching and raise students' standards. Strategies have been put in place to link senior leaders with all aspects of the quality of provision in targeted subjects and areas of the academy.

A process of collecting, analysing and using students' performance information across the curriculum is in place. The first collection of this information has taken place, but the detailed outcomes were still in the process of being collated before being shared with all staff.

Although leaders recognise that developing positive links with parents and carers is a vital part in helping the academy to improve, they have not yet identified specific actions which will help them to engage with as many as possible on a regular basis.

The academy uses a behaviour system based on students understanding the escalating consequences of poor behaviour on themselves and others in their class. When the student reaches a point of potential or actual disruption to learning, they are sent to work in the academy 'port'. This is a withdrawal area, closely supervised, where the students work individually on most but not all of their normal class work. Because these students can stay in isolation for up to a week, they could well miss some of the subjects which they enjoy, do well in, and within which they have no history of disruptive behaviour. There is also a lack of clarity on the part of some staff who supervise students in the 'port' about how the withdrawal includes specific coping devices for the student to minimise or prevent similar antisocial behaviour when they return to the normal lessons.

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

External support

The links with external partners are having a positive effect on senior staff and teachers in the academy. Those governors who met with inspectors said that they receive effective support from Northern Education Trust. Recent links with the local authority are also benefiting the academy in a number of ways, not least with term-time transfer of students from other schools.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Northumberland and the Chief Executive of Northern Education Trust. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Brian Blake
Her Majesty's Inspector