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Barry Hersom
Principal
Colchester Academy
Hawthorne Avenue
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Dear Mr Hersom

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Colchester Academy

Following my visit to your school on 08 March 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the Principal and other senior leaders, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the academy sponsor institutions and governors. The school improvement and action plans were evaluated. HMI visited nine classes to evaluate learning.

Context

There have been no significant changes in the context of the academy since the last inspection.

Main findings

Since the last inspection the academy has, rightly, given priority to the improvement of teaching and learning. Much professional development and coaching has been undertaken. This has included extensive activities to share good teaching practice, for example teachers observing other classes. Teachers now assess the progress

that students make regularly and systematically. This assessment is usually accurate. Because of this the academy has a good understanding of how students are progressing. This information is used well for planning and target setting, but not always used well in class. Sometimes lessons are pitched at a level that is too low and, as a result, learning suffers and students become bored. Skills of independent learning develop well in those classes where students are given the opportunity to develop them. The quality of the marking of written work is too variable.

The school's lesson observation system is broadly accurate when observations are undertaken by senior staff, but sometimes overgenerous when undertaken by subject leaders. This is because too much emphasis is placed on teaching rather than the learning that results from it. In these situations opportunities to evaluate learning in class are lost. Early indications are of improving progress since the last published examination results. This is because teaching is improving in the key areas of mathematics and English. Target-setting is improving and is more challenging for many students.

The school has extended its work with families to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence. Both are below average but are showing an improving trend.

The academy's self-evaluation is broadly accurate. It identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the academy well, though occasionally judgements are overgenerous. Action plans for improvement are thorough, and monitoring by governors and senior leaders is good. At subject level there is sometimes a mismatch between self-evaluation and action plans. Weaknesses are sometimes tackled through an action plan, but are not identified in the self-evaluation.

Governors, many from the sponsoring Further and Higher Education College and University, are experienced and rigorous in their monitoring of the academy. Good challenge is made to underperformance, but this is often not reported well in the written record, making it difficult to monitor progress towards targets. Governors are well-informed, and analyse and interpret complex performance data well.

Senior leaders, governors and the sponsors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommends that further action is taken to:

- Ensure that lesson observations made by middle managers are accurate, and that all lesson observations take due account of the learning taking place in lessons
- Make sure that the weaknesses identified in self evaluations are reflected in action plans.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school makes extensive use of consultants for the monitoring of teaching and learning, and for the monitoring of the school's performance.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and as below.

Yours sincerely

Ian Seath
Her Majesty's Inspector