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19 March 2013

Mrs R Robinson
Headteacher
Swindon Academy
Beech Avenue
Swindon
SN2 1JR

Dear Mrs Robinson

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to Swindon Academy.

Following my visit to your school on 19 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 academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I held discussions with the headteacher, the senior leadership team, three middle leaders in the secondary phase, a middle leader from Key Stage 1, a Year 6 teacher, a group of students from the secondary phase, educational consultants working with the school, and the Chair of the Governing Body. I also evaluated the school improvement and various action plans. In addition, I discussed the systems for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching, students' progress and behaviour, community and parental involvement with the academy.

Context

There have been no significant changes to staff or the school's organisation since the inspection.

Main findings

Senior leaders and the Governing Body have responded positively to the judgements of the January 2013 inspection. They are resolute to improve the school's performance to good and have instigated new policies and practices to bring about the necessary improvement. Senior leaders are keeping track on how well the new systems are being applied to check that there is consistency in lessons and to identify where teachers need further support and guidance. Training has enabled middle and subject leaders to develop their skills in observing lessons, which is helping them to implement improvements in their areas of responsibility. Involvement of the local community and parents has increased. Greater consistency has helped students' behaviour improve with more students in the secondary phase being ready to learn and take part in their lessons.

There is much more to do to ensure greater consistency of good teaching and learning across the academy. Students' progress in some subjects cannot be accurately measured. Not all leaders and managers are confident to advise and challenge their colleagues to improve the quality of their teaching to good or better. Inconsistencies are very apparent in relation to the quality of marking. Similarly, students' knowledge of what they can securely do and what they need to do next to improve is not strong enough. Some lesson time is wasted with older students undertaking work at levels lower than their capability. In contrast, pupils in the primary phase have a better understanding and knowledge about how well they are performing in relation to the National Curriculum levels and sub-levels. As a consequence, they are better placed to work hard in lessons and set themselves challenging tasks and targets.

Action and improvement plans contain just the right amount of detail to enable senior leaders and the Governing Body to have a clear focus on what needs to be done. The academy initially separated the various action plans, policies and monitoring arrangements into separate documents for the primary and secondary phases. Now is the right time for these to be re-united, so that pupils currently in Year 6 have a smooth transition into Year 7.

Senior leaders and the Governing Body have started to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following my visit to the school, I recommend that further action is taken to:

- ensure that lesson success criteria do not 'cap' the progress that students can make
- ensure all subjects benchmark students' starting points
- ensure that valuable learning time is not wasted by students completing work that they can already securely do
- enable pupils in Year 6 to have a smooth transition into Year 7

- raise the expectation in the senior phase so that each lesson is closely targeted to meet individual groups of student's needs to the same depth as for the primary phase.
- ensure that students in the secondary phase have a better understanding about their day-to-day performance in relation to the National Curriculum levels
- ensure middle and subject leaders hold colleagues robustly to account for student progress, based on accurate subject-specific benchmarking, and that the academy's policies and procedures are consistently applied and followed in lessons
- review and evaluate the impact of the actions taken to improve students' progress.

External support

The support provided by educational consultants several of whom started their work in November 2012 has helped the academy improve.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and The Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny

Her Majesty's Inspector