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8 May 2013

Mr John Reilly
The Headteacher
Gloucester Academy
Cotteswold Road
Gloucester
GL4 6RN

Dear Mr Reilly

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Gloucester Academy

Following my visit to your school on 8 May 2013 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in October 2012. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Department of Education.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2012.

- Rapidly raise attainment and rates of progress for all groups of students in all subjects through teaching that is consistently good or better, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - communicate and maintain high expectations of students throughout lessons
 - are skilled in making reliable and accurate judgements about students' levels of attainment and progress
 - make effective use of assessments of students' attainment to plan activities that are closely matched to students' learning needs and which support the development of literacy
 - routinely check students' understanding through questioning that targets individuals and that probes and develops their understanding
 - consistently and rigorously apply the academy's behaviour management systems so that learning is not interrupted
 - provide marking and feedback that are of a consistently high quality and have a demonstrable impact on the quality, quantity and presentation of students' work.
- Continue to reduce absence rates, ensuring that attendance is sustained at a level at least in line with the national average for all groups.
- Ensure that leaders at all levels, including governors, are contributing strongly and equally effectively to the drive for further improvement by:
 - challenging weak performance through routine and rigorous monitoring sharing and embedding the most effective practice in school
 - implementing a coherent cycle of evaluation, monitoring, performance management and professional development that is closely tailored to individual teachers' needs and has a demonstrable impact on outcomes.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 8 May 2013

Evidence

I met with headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team. I also spoke to a group of students, three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and an external consultant who provides support to senior leaders. I visited classes with senior leaders and we looked at the students' books when in class. I looked at the information collected on student achievement and the way in which you regularly check the improvements that teachers are making.

Context

A new deputy headteacher and four teachers have been employed since my visit in December 2012. The new building, which is being constructed adjacent to the school, is due to be finished in August 2013.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

Governors have a clear direction for the academy and are relentless in their drive to improve the education it offers. The fortnightly meetings held with senior leaders challenge on-going improvements to student achievement and the performance of teachers. The impact of these meetings has led to an accelerated pace of change. New appointments to key roles have strengthened the leadership of the school and this has given the academy a greater capacity to make on-going improvements. The purchase of resources, such as cameras and ear-pieces to facilitate coaching, are prioritised to support improvements in teaching. Additional government funding provided to support those students at risk of failing to do as well as their peers is used sensibly and with good impact. For instance, a breakfast club provides a nourishing start to the day for students who may not have the opportunity for this at home. It also supports the drive to improve attendance.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Student progress has accelerated and standards are improving. The students understand what levels they are working at and many know exactly what they must do to get the best grade possible in their tests and examinations. Extra sessions and revision classes are supporting those students who have gaps in their learning to rectify previous inadequacies in teaching.
- In lessons, teachers think carefully about what topics and themes would appeal to students' interests and enthusiasms so that they are made meaningful for them. For example, a catering course which focuses on key life skills, such as purchasing sensible food, cooking it healthily and presenting it for their classmates to eat, has successfully engaged students who find a more academic approach to food technology a challenge.
- Teachers ask questions which make the students think for themselves.

- By introducing a new system at lunchtime, where teaching staff join students at well-presented tables complete with cloths, cutlery and weekly menus, the conduct of students during the lunch-time break has been transformed. The use of an on-going power-point presentation during this break provides tips for key skills and gives information on clubs. Free access to the grand piano provides opportunities for any budding musicians and there is a much calmer start to the afternoon lesson.
- In the new building there will be a designated 'heart' area and, to prepare for this, the dining hall has been created as a temporary measure. A group of students are proud to have been appointed as 'heart surgeons' and have been responsible for the painting of a wall in this area where high quality art work is displayed and appreciated.
- Some groups of students who are at risk of not doing as well as their classmates, for example those who are disabled or have special educational needs, those eligible for free school meals and persistent absentees, have improved their attendance. This is because they are individually supported and links between home and the academy have been successfully forged.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- There is no consistency to the marking of the students' books. Although a small proportion of books seen had comments from teachers that helped the students understand what they had done successfully and gave pointers for improvement, the vast majority were either unmarked or provided meaningless comments.
- Teachers do not have high enough expectations of the way in which students present their work in books and, consequently, there is no pride in the way that written tasks are completed.
- The academy is yet to improve the attendance rates for a specific group of minority ethnic students. Nevertheless, a way to involve the parents of these students in the life of the academy has been recently introduced with the intention of improving their attendance.

External support

The external consultant has provided a high level of challenge to senior leaders and this has played a crucial part in the accelerated progress made by the academy since the first monitoring visit. By coaching and supporting key leaders, this consultant has ensured that the information gathered on individual student progress is accessible, clearly understood and used to improve teaching and learning. The academy has also benefited from an outstanding school in the Birmingham area, which has provided both support and training to improve teaching.