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7 June 2013

Mr A Pugh
The Principal
Castle Hall Academy
Richard Thorpe Avenue
Crowlees Road
Mirfield
West Yorkshire
WF14 9PH

Dear Mr Pugh

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Castle Hall Academy, Kirklees

Following my visit to your academy on 6 June 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, members of the governing body, and the academy's school improvement adviser assigned to it by the local authority. A range of documentation was reviewed, including the post-Ofsted action plan section of the academy improvement plan, governing body minutes and notes of visit records by the school improvement adviser. A tour of the academy, which included visits to a number of lessons, was undertaken.

Context

An assistant principal, currently on secondment, has resigned as a result of obtaining a position at the school at which he is currently working. A number of teachers are leaving the academy at the end of this term and new teachers have already been appointed to replace some of them. The academy has decided to appoint additional staff in science as a deliberate strategy to help improve performance in that subject.

Main findings

Senior leaders have responded promptly to the outcomes of the inspection and are determined that the academy is judged to be at least good at its next inspection. The relatively new senior leadership team exhibits a sense of purpose and there is a considerable amount of activity emanating from an extremely detailed action plan which has been put in place to bring about improvement quickly. This post-Ofsted action plan, which forms part of the academy improvement plan, focuses clearly on each of the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report. It sets down specific activities, the people taking responsibility for each issue, milestones and deadlines. However, precise evaluation criteria are not clear and there is insufficient reference to how governors will hold senior leaders to account. In addition, the plan does not have a long term timeframe as it stops at the end of this term. Discussions were held on the importance of drafting the next stage of the plan and to considering how best to incorporate evaluation procedures by senior leaders and governors.

Senior leaders are clear about how they can use the best practice from within the academy as well as from other schools to improve the quality of teaching, further develop skills of leaders and managers, and strengthen the impact of improvement planning. However, they have yet to formalise support arrangements with Shelley College and the local authority in relation to the precise nature of the school-to-school support to be organised and accessed by the academy.

Evidence from the academy's monitoring procedures indicates that actions taken since the inspection are starting to have the desired impact. Staff are clear of what is expected of them and the latest monitoring of the revised marking procedures, for example, indicate that the quality of feedback to students is becoming more consistent. Data on students' performance is being analysed thoroughly and it is being used more effectively to inform teachers' planning and preparation. The latest assessment of students' performance suggests that more students are on track to achieve their targets. Additional training is being targeted to ensure all staff are aware of the characteristics of good and outstanding teaching. This work is beginning to have a positive impact on teaching and on students' attitudes to learning, as is the move to grading students' attitudes to learning rather than their effort.

Governors receive regular reports from senior leaders, question these leaders robustly and have a good understanding of the barriers yet to be overcome. It is clear that as well as providing challenge they also provide support for the principal and his senior team. Governors are knowledgeable and focused on what needs to be achieved to help the academy improve. To this end, they have formed a specific working group to review progress against the areas for improvement on a regular basis. Since the inspection they have discussed the action plan and the early signs of impact of actions on three separate occasions in the space of three months. However, the criteria they will use to evaluate the action plan, and the process of drawing up and signing-off the next stage of the plan with a longer time frame, are not sufficiently clear.

Senior leaders and governors 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 specific evaluation procedures for each feature of the plan
- clarify within the plan the precise role of governors in ensuring that the actions identified bring about the necessary improvements within the next two years
- determine both the timescales for drawing up the next stage of the plan and the details of the plan so that it is finalised before the end of this term
- forward this plan to the monitoring HMI once it has been signed-off by governors
- as a matter of urgency, formalise the partnership arrangements with Shelley College and the local authority so that the academy's students and teachers can benefit from high quality and focused school-to-school support in its drive to ensure that the academy is judged to be at least good at its next inspection.

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

External support

Senior leaders welcome the challenge and support provided by the local authority and by links they have forged with teachers and leaders in other schools. However, high quality school-to-school support with Shelley College has not yet been finalised. As a result, the academy is not yet accessing all the guidance and assistance available to help it move quickly to good.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Maddison

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority - including where the school is an academy
- the academy chain where relevant
- Diocese - for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- The lead inspector.