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18 June 2013

Mr Ian Hamilton
Acting Principal
Discovery Academy
Discovery South
Longton
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST3 2NA

Dear Mr Hamilton

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Discovery Academy,
Stoke-On-Trent**

Following my visit to your school on 17 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 school 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 January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the Vice Principal, the incoming Executive Principal, representatives from the governing body and a representative of the sponsor to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated, a number of short visits to lessons were made and school documentation was examined.

Context

Since the last inspection, a new Executive Principal has been appointed for September. Twenty one teachers, including two Assistant Principals, have either left or are leaving at the end of the term due to a restructuring exercise and a reduction in the number of students admitted into the academy. There have been four new governors appointed and the academy is moving to a new, purpose built school in September.

Main findings

Work has begun to address the issues identified at the inspection in January 2013. Priorities have been agreed and action plans have been implemented to address areas of weakness. You, along with senior leaders, the governing body and sponsor have responded positively to the outcome of the inspection and are working to improve the academy. There is a great deal of instability at the present time; a new staffing structure has been introduced and the academy is operating on two separate sites.

The current improvement plan addresses areas identified in the recent inspection and has clear priorities, actions and measurable success criteria. While there are monitoring and evaluation procedures identified in the plan, they do not sufficiently involve the governing body. The plan is in place until the end of this term but there is no longer term view of how the academy will improve.

Improving the quality of teaching and learning has been identified as the main area for improvement. The quality of teaching is carefully monitored. Where teaching is less than good, robust conversations take place and programmes of support are put in place. Where teaching is strong, focused areas have been identified, for example, assessment and marking, lesson structure and independent learning. This is shared with teachers and is intended to help staff to improve.

Whole staff training has taken place on the areas for improvement. For example, teachers have been trained on how to better meet the needs of all learners and how to improve students' behaviour for learning. Although you and leaders say teaching has improved, there is little evidence of how this has impacted on outcomes for students.

Predicted attainment grades for the end of Year 11 are collected and analysed. This information indicates that improvements will be made in the standards reached in English. However, similar gains cannot be seen in mathematics and currently, standards are predicted to remain significantly below national expectations for both 2013 and 2014. The director and deputy director of learning for mathematics have visited local schools to observe good and outstanding practice and as a result are rewriting their schemes of work.

Changes are in place to alter how subjects are taught. This includes a greater emphasis on teaching students the GCSE syllabus and giving students longer to study GCSE subjects. You felt, in the past, students were not given sufficient time to consolidate their learning which had a negative impact on the standards they reached.

The governors are knowledgeable and insightful. They have committed a significant amount of time to ensure the new building is ready for September. As a result, you and senior staff have been able to focus on improving the quality of teaching and the raising of standards. Governors have been instrumental in the development of a new staffing structure and the management of teachers' performance. They acknowledge the need to become more involved in monitoring students' outcomes and the quality of teaching through more focused visits to the academy.

Senior leaders, governors and the sponsor are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- rapidly improve standards in mathematics
- develop the improvement plan to include actions and timescales over a longer period of time
- link outcomes for students with the quality of teaching they receive
- ensure governors rigorously monitor students' outcomes and the quality of teaching through regular visits to the academy.

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

External support

Staff at the academy are working with a number of schools to help them improve. This includes observing good and outstanding practice, developing subject leaders and engaging in a programme to improve teaching. An external consultant is working with the academy. This provides an external view of the academy's performance that governors find valuable. You are confident that this support is already impacting on the quality of teaching and is tailored well to the academy's needs. There is some evidence to suggest the support is improving outcomes in English, but you acknowledge more needs to be done to improve standards in other subjects and especially in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Millward

Her Majesty's Inspector

- 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.