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Dr Nigel Jepson
Headteacher
Kearsley Academy
Springfield Road
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Bolton
Lancashire
BL4 8HY

Dear Dr Jepson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kearsley Academy, Bolton

Following my visit to your school on 11 July 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 academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 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, students, members of the Governing Body, and a representative of the academy sponsor to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated.

Context

Since the last inspection the academy sponsor Northern Education has become Northern Education Trust. Bolton Council is no longer an academy sponsor although it continues to have partnership arrangements with the academy alongside the University of Bolton.

Main findings

Data from the early entry results indicate that students in the current Year 11 are making better progress than those in previous cohorts. More rigorous systems are now established to monitor students' progress. Students from years 7 to 10 who are underachieving are now being identified and are given extra help. The sixth form is starting to show success with the first cohort of students gaining places at university and the first students from other schools planning to join the sixth form in September.

Various strategies are in place to improve the quality of teaching. Several teachers have registered for the good and outstanding teacher programmes; innovative ways to share good practice using flip cameras and computer video footage are being explored; departments are focussing on literacy and numeracy across the curriculum; and the role of non-teaching pastoral staff is being enhanced to include support for academic progress by developing their understanding of data. Strategies are in place to raise students' aspiration through a university awareness programme and assemblies celebrate progress and achievement.

Students feel safe in school but would like more opportunities to engage in lunchtime activities rather than 'just hang around', and they would like to be given more responsibility. You have outlined in the Improvement Plan your intention to, '*encourage students across all different sub-groups to take extended responsibility for seeking to raise standards*' but it is unclear how you intend to do this. Students do not think that the student council is strong and of those spoken to, few knew who their council representative was or what they had achieved on their behalf. Several students felt that their pleas for equalities in sports provision for girls in the curriculum and girls' access to sports facilities at breaks had not been listened to. Neither did they recall being asked to contribute to discussions or surveys about teaching and learning.

The Governing Body are informed, supportive, and prepared to challenge the leadership when required. However, the academy improvement plan that has been approved by the Governing Body is insufficiently clear about how intended outcomes will be achieved. For example, in the section on leadership and management one of the key points is, '*To continue to be ambitious in pursuing excellence for all pupils through promoting the number one Academy aim of enabling all pupils irrespectively of age, ability or background, to achieve their full potential academically and socially*' and the success criteria for this aim are that '*All different groups of pupils achieve to their full potential e.g. making expected value-added progress from start of KS3 to end of KS4*'. This is insufficient because it gives no indication of the intended actions, any interim targets or review milestones. The academy improvement plan also addresses the need to ensure that '*all subject areas demonstrate how the needs of SEND students will be met*' but fails to specifically mention high attaining students and how their needs should be met. The academy sponsor has plans in place to evaluate and revisit the academy improvement plan.

Senior leaders, governors, and the academy 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:

- revisit and update the academy improvement plan to ensure that strategies for improvement are clear and detailed with specific review dates and targets
- explore ways to harness the student voice so that students can better contribute to the improvement agenda
- ensure that judgments about the quality of teaching and learning are secure.

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

The academy sponsor is providing support to assist and challenge the leadership team. They also fund an achievement partner who attends meetings of the Governing Body, reports to the Trust Board and is able to broker further support as required. The Governing Body share a determination to improve outcomes for students, and are receiving advice and guidance from the academy sponsor.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Bolton.

Yours sincerely

Janet Palmer

Her Majesty's Inspector