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Brian Myatt
Principal
Countesthorpe Community College
Winchester Road
Countesthorpe
Leicestershire
LE8 5PR

Dear Mr Myatt

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Countesthorpe Community College

Following my visit to your school on 25 September 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- identify milestones linked to priorities in the improvement plans to evaluate progress over time
- strengthen the accountability of middle leaders by requiring them to ensure good quality teaching and good rates of progress across classes
- agree a joint moderation programme with feeder schools to ensure robust and accurate assessment at the end of Year 9, as a basis for rapid progress for Year 10 students, on transfer.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, students, the Chair of the Governing Body and six representatives, and the College Improvement Partner to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans were evaluated. A range of documentation was scrutinised including evaluations of performance outcomes for 2013, a report on progress since the inspection, governing body minutes, and staff training records. A tour of the school was conducted including visits to lessons.

Context

Since the inspection fourteen members of staff have left the school including a Vice Principal who took early retirement. All have been replaced including a new Vice Principal. As a result, leadership roles have been reviewed and adjusted. Three new parent governors have been appointed; a recruitment process is underway for staff governors.

Main findings

School leaders did not waste any time in tackling the areas identified for improvement. This included strengthening the quality of teaching in mathematics, and sharpening the interventions already underway following weak GCSE results in 2012. Leaders and governors agree that student progress in mathematics is a significant barrier to the school being judged as 'good'. The inspection findings prompted firmer links across the family of schools to aid continuity and progression in mathematics. A stronger focus on assessment and planning is helping to target teaching at specific skills to improve students' knowledge and understanding. The involvement of students in target setting and assessment and more regular contact with parents is also helping to raise expectations. A ten percentage point rise in GCSE grades A* to C in mathematics this year provides encouraging evidence of impact.

A high priority has been set for staff training and development linked to the Teacher's Standards. An input on data and measures of progress has proven to be an effective way for staff to see how different subjects and groups of learners perform within the school. This has led to a successful focus on lesson planning; and an agreed format to promote consistency. The emphasis on how different groups of students will be supported in their learning is a key element. Staff have welcomed a new strategy for improving teaching quality that enables them to share and develop their practice in small groups.

New initiatives are underpinned by detailed short-term improvement plans, sharply focused on identified priorities. The success criteria are measurable in most respects. Milestones to track progress are not explicit to support a thorough evaluation of the school's actions over time. Further work is required to identify appropriate indicators and benchmarks to support the journey to good and better.

The monitoring of the school's work has been strengthened, led by senior leaders. Feedback to staff is more rigorous and systematic with the expectation that teachers take ownership of their own improvement linked to the performance management process. Middle leaders are not yet fully accountable for developing their staff and making sure that progress in lessons is at least good. Plans are advanced to develop the quality and consistency of middle leaders through training and joint activities.

The governing body receives high quality information on the school's performance and priorities. Governors recognise that continuity and progression from age 5 to 19 is a challenge. As an Academy Trust of four schools that includes the two feeder 11 to 14 schools, and a primary school they are well placed to strengthen student progression, especially at transition from Year 9. Cross phase moderation of standards at the end of Year 9 is not in place to provide the school with robust assessments to underpin progress in Year 10.

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

Good use has been made of the Improvement Partner who provides external challenge to the school. Monitoring and evaluation activities undertaken are well planned with the Principal and Vice Principal. This has been most evident in mathematics. The school is a member of a Teaching Alliance along with 16 other schools and colleges across Leicestershire. This provides good opportunities for training new staff, networks for senior and middle leaders and the sharing of expertise. Cross phase work has accelerated in Countesthorpe's family of schools since the formation of the Trust. This has been particularly evident in mathematics with regular meeting for joint planning to support a consistent approach to mathematics. Monitoring is now used routinely to review the quality of planning and assessment.

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

Yours sincerely

Nada Trikic
Her Majesty's Inspector