

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T: 0121 679 9161
Direct email: ann.morris@serco.com



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John Keller
Principal
Guthlaxton College Wigston
Station Road
Leicestershire
LE18 2DS

Dear Mr Keller

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Guthlaxton College Wigston

Following my visit to your school on 14 October 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 April. 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:

- ensure that judgements on teaching quality are underpinned by evidence of students' progress over time
- strengthen the role of the Governing Body's leadership and management sub-committee by identifying the key indicators of progress to be reported by the principal
- agree joint moderation arrangements with the feeder schools, and shared schemes of work in English and mathematics to support accurate assessment and rapid progress for Year 10 students
- strengthen the improvement plan by:
 - identifying who will monitor, evaluate and report on progress
 - including success criteria linked to levels of progress for cohorts and groups of students linked to national benchmarks

- identifying more precisely how improvements in leadership and management will be measured.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, students, the Chair of the Governing Body and three representatives to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement action plans were evaluated. A range of documentation was scrutinised including records of lesson observation, the quality assurance programme, details of training and external reviews of progress.

Context

A change to the age range in one of the academy's former feeder schools has led to a reduction in student numbers. This has resulted in a reduction in staffing.

Main findings

The principal has acted swiftly to tackle the areas identified for improvement. Checks on the academy's work have become more rigorous with far greater emphasis on national benchmarks in judging quality and progress. Links between senior and middle leaders have strengthened with a clear agenda focused on the Ofsted action plan. A high priority on attendance, uniform, behaviour and punctuality has already led to improvement, confirmed through an external review and student feedback. Leaders are rightly focusing on securing greater consistency in the application of new procedures.

Shortly after the inspection all teachers were jointly observed by senior leaders to provide a base-line of teaching quality. The analysis has led to a systematic approach to drive improvement. A strong feature of this programme is the training and support that helps teachers meet the minimum expectation of 'good' teaching. Training for teachers has been a high priority with sessions on student engagement, challenge, questioning and feedback. Unannounced follow-up lesson observations are used to check the effectiveness of training. Improvements in teaching have been encouraging with intervention programmes firmly in place where teaching is not consistently good. Stronger practitioners take responsibility for providing training and support, and sharing good practice. Good use has been made of external support from a 'teaching school' to validate observation judgements. The next step is to bring together evidence from progress data, book scrutiny and student views to provide a robust view of the impact of teaching over time.

The improvement plan is sharply focused on inspection priorities. It is not always clear who will monitor the actions and who will evaluate progress linked to national benchmarks. The success criteria for achievement do not have enough emphasis on the proportion of students to meet or exceed national expectations in English and mathematics from different starting points for cohorts and groups of students.

The academy has identified inconsistencies in the assessment data provided by the feeder schools. Staff at the academy are not involved in joint moderation of standards in Year 9. Schemes of work are not shared in English and mathematics to support continuity and progression. This is a barrier to students' achievement.

Since the inspection the governing body has increased the number of subject links and visits. This is helping them to contribute more effectively to the evaluation of the academy. The leadership and management sub-committee has not identified the range of information they require to provide an appropriate level of support and challenge. The current 'milestone report' is not sufficiently concise with coverage of all key indicators and benchmarks. The Chair of the Governing Body has commissioned a review by a National Leader of Governance to strengthen the contribution of the governing body.

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 has made good use of external support to validate judgements on teaching, behaviour and safety, and for feedback on actions taken to date. This is supporting the refinement of action plans. The governing body has identified leadership and management as the next focus for external review.

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

Yours sincerely

Nada Trikic
Her Majesty's Inspector