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23 October 2013

Alan Armstrong
Interim headteacher
Gloucester Academy
Cotteswold Road
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Dear Mr Armstrong

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Gloucester Academy

Following my visit to your school on 22 October 2013 I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in October 2012. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is not making enough progress towards the removal of the serious weakness designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Academies Advisers Unit, the Education Funding Agency, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Gloucestershire.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2012

- Rapidly raise attainment and rates of progress for all groups of students in all subjects through teaching that is consistently good or better, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - communicate and maintain high expectations of students throughout lessons
 - are skilled in making reliable and accurate judgements about students' levels of attainment and progress
 - make effective use of assessments of students' attainment to plan activities that are closely matched to students' learning needs and which support the development of literacy
 - routinely check students' understanding through questioning that targets individuals and that probes and develops their understanding
 - consistently and rigorously apply the academy's behaviour management systems so that learning is not interrupted
 - provide marking and feedback that are of a consistently high quality and have a demonstrable impact on the quality, quantity and presentation of students' work.

- Continue to reduce absence rates, ensuring that attendance is sustained at a level at least in line with the national average for all groups.

- Ensure that leaders at all levels, including governors, are contributing strongly and equally effectively to the drive for further improvement by:
 - challenging weak performance through routine and rigorous monitoring
 - sharing and embedding the most effective practice in school
 - implementing a coherent cycle of evaluation, monitoring, performance management and professional development that is closely tailored to individual teachers' needs and has a demonstrable impact on outcomes.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 22 October 2013

Evidence

The inspector met with the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders, a group of students representing Years 8 to 12, the Chair of the Governing Body and an external consultant who is currently sharing the role of interim headteacher. Visits to classes were made with senior leaders and the work in the students' books was considered.

Context

Since the last visit in May 2013, the students and staff have moved into the new accommodation and the old building has been demolished. Thirteen teachers and 14 support assistants have left. Twenty-seven teachers, seven of whom are newly qualified, and 13 support staff have joined the school. The headteacher left in September 2013. Two external consultants have been appointed as interim headteachers until a new appointment can be made for the start of the summer term.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leaders and managers at all levels are failing to bring about the necessary improvements required to improve the achievement of all students. At the time of the last monitoring visit the positive judgement made on the improvements to student achievement were based on inaccurate information presented to the inspector. The proportion of students who were predicted to achieve five good quality GCSEs, including English and mathematics, was deemed to be 43%. However, only 27% achieved this standard, and this was fewer than in 2012. The Chair of the Governing Body acted swiftly in undertaking an investigation into the outcome of these inaccurate predictions. He has put in place rigorous systems to ensure that teacher assessments of students' work are based on the relevant examination board guidelines and are moderated by senior colleagues. Although there has been some improvement in the proportion of students achieving a grade A* to C in mathematics, those students who are in receipt of additional funding did not make enough progress.

At the time of the last visit the inspector asked leaders and managers to improve the quality and consistency of the marking in students' books. It was also clearly pointed out during the visit and recorded in the monitoring letter that teachers did not have high enough expectations of the way in which students presented their work in books. Books remain poorly marked and expectations of the students are much too low. Consequently, many of the students are working at levels much lower than expected for their age and stage of education.

In the last few weeks the interim headteachers have restructured the roles and responsibilities of senior staff to ensure there is greater accountability. Having now spent eight weeks in the new building, the use of space has been evaluated. There are plans in place to review the daily timetable and alter some of the ways in which the spaces are used. The Chair of the Governing Body has established a smaller Interim Academy Board which is focusing closely on urgent improvements. A recovery plan and a clearer system for providing evidence on teaching and learning are being finalised.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The appointment of an Attendance Improvement Manager and a support team, coupled with the introduction of rewards for regular attenders, has had a positive effect on encouraging students to make every effort to attend their lessons each day.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The quality of teaching and learning over time.
- The attitudes of a significant proportion of students towards their learning.
- The lack of knowledge faculty leaders have about using additional funding to support those students who are in receipt of it.
- Low staff morale, which is affecting the academy's capacity to improve.

External support

By talking to staff and students, the two external consultants appointed as interim headteachers have quickly identified the key priorities. These are clearly highlighted in a management plan which is focusing on making rapid improvements. Another external consultant is to deliver training to senior staff on roles and responsibilities.