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John Martin
Oldbury Academy
Pound Road
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Dear Mr Martin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Oldbury Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 19 November 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 academy 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 September 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 academy should take further action to:

- ensure that students take greater responsibility for correct spelling, punctuation and grammar in their written work.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders and the Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the previous inspection. The academy improvement plans and the minutes of the governing body were evaluated. Brief observations were made with the headteacher of part of eight lessons. Students' exercise books were scrutinised. The impact of the academy's monitoring activities was evaluated.

Context

There are no significant changes in context since the previous inspection.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have acted with determination to address the development issues highlighted in the report. These are included in your updated academy improvement plans. You have tightened up your monitoring procedures and revisited earlier work on developing literacy across the academy. This is promoting students' reading. All teachers have information on students' reading levels that they use well to plan work.

You have developed the work of your Teaching and Learning Group to increase its ability to share good practice and to move all teaching to good. The Teaching and Learning Group has introduced new non-negotiables to inform teachers' planning, the start of lessons and to improve the pace and challenge of learning. The marking of work and quality of written feedback to students have improved. Appropriately, all staff are expected to mark spelling, punctuation and grammar. Opportunities are missed to encourage students to take responsibility for checking the accuracy of their spelling, punctuation and grammar. It is too early to see the impact of these strategies. All teachers have written checklists to help students to improve their study skills. Year 11 students at risk of under achievement have a senior member of staff to mentor and support them as do students targeted for B and higher grades at GCSE. Procedures to monitor progress and attendance in the sixth form have been tightened up. As a result, attendance in the sixth form is improving.

A new tracking system is used to monitor the progress of different groups of students including higher attaining ones and those eligible to receive the pupil premium. Analysis of tracking data is shared with staff and governors. This enables governors and senior staff to hold teachers to account for students' progress. Performance management procedures now take more account of progress information and all teachers have targets for their students' progress in key skills. Middle managers use information from their monitoring to inform department meetings. This enables them to set objective targets with their teams and to identify training needs. Provision for students with special educational needs has been reorganised to provide additional support to any student who might benefit from it.

The governing body has used the findings from the external review to reshape its committee structure and reorganise its links with departments to better hold senior leaders to account. The training provided to the clerk to the governors has ensured that the minutes of governing body meetings indicate more clearly the challenge made by governors to senior leaders and the actions that follow.

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

External support

Your academy is appropriately drawing on the support of three others, Yardley's, High Ercal and Kingswinford. The academies have similar contexts thus staff can identify good practice in each other's institutions that they could feasibly implement themselves. The collaboration is in its early stages and it is too soon to see its impact.

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

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector