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11 December 2013

Mrs Jane Hopkinson
Headteacher
Priory City of Lincoln Academy
Skellingthorpe Road
LN6 0EP

Dear Mrs Hopkinson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Priory City of Lincoln Academy

Following my visit to your school on 10 December 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 September 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- explore ways of using progression matrices to track progress for cohorts and groups from their different starting points
- strengthen the accountability of middle leaders by requiring them to ensure good quality teaching and good rates of progress across classes
- agree a programme of visits for members of the Academy Governing Committee so they can see students at work, and have opportunities to talk with different groups of students
- strengthen the development plan by:
 - including milestones so that progress can be evaluated over time linked to measurable success criteria
 - identifying who will evaluate and report on progress linked to the action points.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, students, the Chief Executive Officer of the Federation Trust, the Chair of the Education and Standards Committee, the Chair of the Academy Governing Committee and a parent governor to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. A telephone discussion was held with the Chair of the Federation Trust. The academy development plan was evaluated. A range of documentation was scrutinised including reports on progress, department monitoring, attendance and exclusions, and records of lesson observation. A 'learning walk' was conducted with the assistant headteacher.

Context

A new head of mathematics has been appointed to commence in January 2014. Two primary specialists will join the Trust in January 2014, to provide additional input and expertise for low ability students in English and mathematics.

Main findings

Academy leaders, governors and trust members acknowledge that improvement must be rapid to tackle weaknesses in students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics. Recent changes in the membership of the Trust have resulted in new ways of working. This is evident in the action taken to increase the capacity of senior leadership, and through regular and robust monitoring of students' attainment and progress. The use of a 'score card' helps leaders to compare average point scores gained with previous years. This is providing an encouraging picture of improvement. The use of progression matrices is the next step to evaluate progress from students' different starting points. The use of challenging targets is becoming embedded to raise expectations.

A teaching and learning group has been formed with a strong focus on planning for progression. This is reinforced through the appraisal process to support consistency. Feedback from lesson observation is used to identify common themes for training. Improving the quality of teaching and learning is now a regular agenda item for department meetings. A systematic approach to improving teaching has been adopted. Three teachers have joined the six week 'improving teacher programme' run by the Trust's Training school. Leaders recognise that judgements on teaching must be underpinned by evidence of students' progress over time.

Senior leaders have shared their areas of expertise across the team to support quality and consistency in their work with middle leaders. An improvement in the quality of information on progress, teaching, students' work and views is helping to sharpen accountability. Middle leaders are increasingly involved in quality assurance activities supported by senior leaders as part of a regular cycle of departmental reviews. The quality and consistency of middle leadership must improve quickly to

drive rapid progress. The gathering of students' views is becoming a routine part of self-evaluation evidence; this provides helpful insights on the academy's provision.

A high priority has been set for regular attendance with students and parents. Term time holidays and absence are routinely challenged. This has led to an improvement in overall attendance compared with last year, and a fall in persistent absence. There has been a drop in exclusions because alternative provision is considered at an earlier stage.

The Academy Governing Committee receives detailed reports on different aspects of the academy's work. Links are established with senior leaders to extend their understanding further. Routine visits are not programmed for governors to see students at work or to gather their views on how they are progressing. Governors are clear about the priorities in the development plan. This is tightly focused on the findings of the inspection report. Most of the priorities are supported by measurable success criteria but not all. Milestones are not identified to support checks on progress over time. It is not clear from the plan who will evaluate the success of the actions and when progress will be reported. The Chair of the Academy Governing Committee has been successful in securing additional resources from the Trust to meet identified needs.

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 makes good use of expertise and support from the Trust. The Chair of the Education and Standards Committee completes half-termly 'score cards' of attainment and progress for the four academies, on behalf of the Trust. This process supports a sharp evaluation of the academy's progress. The Chief Executive Officer of the Trust has brokered additional expertise to increase the academy's capacity to improve. This has included access to the Teaching school programmes within the Trust. A quality assurance role is undertaken on behalf of the Trust to check on progress and to validate internal monitoring. A School Improvement Partner has been appointed to work with the teaching and learning group to secure consistency in lesson observation. This has been well received. Leaders have identified three schools where there are successful practitioners in mathematics. This is supporting the mathematics team to challenge students of different abilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Nada Trikic
Her Majesty's Inspector