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11 December 2013

Mr Robert Howard
Headteacher
Heanor Gate Science College
Kirkley Drive
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Dear Mr Howard

Special measures monitoring inspection of Heanor Gate Science College

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 confirm the inspection findings. 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings with you and the other senior leaders, the Chair the Governing Body and its vice chair, and the academy's improvement partner. I carried out a tour of the academy with you, and spoke informally to students and looked at their workbooks. The academy trust's statement of action, academy improvement plan and other documentation were also evaluated, including the records of governing body meetings and academy assessment data.

Context

Since the last section 5 inspection, the subject leader for English has changed; English is now led by one of the deputy headteachers, whose specialism is English. The governing body is in the process of reconstituting itself to create a clear separation between the powers of the trust and local governance. The academy is

currently in consultation with the Department for Education about appointing a suitable sponsor.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You, supported by a large and capable leadership team, have wasted no time in addressing the key areas for improvement identified in the recent section 5 report. The improvement plan sets out clear expectations for the whole academy. Currently, the plan does not always specify who will evaluate the effectiveness of the actions you take, although the method is described well and supported by the academy's quality assurance calendar. Additionally, there is no clear distinction between the person who will lead on a particular action and who will check that it has taken place.

Action has already been taken to address weaknesses in teaching and learning with some early positive signs. Whole-school training on the use of student assessment data and lesson planning to meet the needs of different ability groups are beginning to show an impact in the classroom. You and the other senior leaders have communicated your vision clearly; five whole-school principles essential for good teaching and learning have been promoted. Your records show this has supported lesson planning and improved the quality of teaching. In addition, leaders have strengthened the internal capacity of improving the quality of teaching by establishing a comprehensive coaching programme for staff. Teachers are now planning lessons that pay more attention to the needs of students and creating more opportunities for students to work collaboratively. This was evident in the lessons inspectors saw, although some of the strategies teachers are using are not yet sufficiently developed. A recent external review of teaching and learning, commissioned by the academy, agreed with these findings.

Leaders have improved the management of behaviour. This, together with improved engagement in the classroom, has led to a dramatic reduction in fixed term exclusions compared with the same period last year. Information, advice and guidance have also been improved to help students to make appropriate course choices in the sixth form.

The governing body has taken swift action to improve how it holds leaders to account. A robust performance management system has been introduced. In particular, your own performance targets are more precise and are now closely aligned to the challenging success criteria set out in the academy's improvement plan. Governors have recognised that periodic performance management checks during the year will alert them to any potential underperformance. They have received valuable support from the academy's improvement partner. A new, highly

skilled 'strategic group' has been established, specifically to monitor the work of the academy and test out the information given to governors by academy leaders. The local authority has recently carried out an external review of governance. This confirms that governors now have an accurate view of their own strengths and weaknesses.

You have enlisted a number of external professionals to support the planned improvements. The work of the recently appointed improvement partner for the academy is having an important impact, particularly in the area of governance. An existing partnership with a teaching school alliance has been strengthened, giving staff, especially subject leaders, greater opportunities to learn from best practice.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The academy trust's statement of action is fit for purpose

The academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the academy may appoint NQTs.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State and the Chair of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Zarina Connolly
Her Majesty's Inspector