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15 January 2014

Mrs Susan Johnson
Headteacher
Longfield Academy of Sport
Longfield Road
Darlington
County Durham
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Dear Mrs Johnson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Longfield Academy of Sport, Darlington

Following my visit to the academy on 14 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 November 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:

- Improve the skills of governors in using performance information so they can directly challenge senior leaders about the academy's performance.
- Ensure the academy's marking policy is consistently applied in all departments so that all students receive regular feedback about how to improve their work.
- Quickly establish routine one-to-one accountability meetings with all staff and their line managers so that all can be held routinely accountable for students' progress.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, senior and middle leaders and representatives of the governing body. A range of evidence, including the academy's self-evaluation and action planning documents, was scrutinised and discussed with senior staff.

Main findings

While many of the actions to tackle the academy's weaknesses were in place prior to the inspection, there has been a marked change in the urgency and pace with which these activities are now being pursued. Critically, governors and senior leaders have ensured there is now a resolute and secure focus on improving students' achievement. This work is being underpinned by an number of key actions:

- The setting of Key Stage 4 targets based directly on end of Key Stage 2 test results which demonstrate heightened expectations of students' capabilities.
- Establishing a well-constructed and managed assessment system which is providing an increasingly reliable analysis of individual student progress across all subject areas.
- Putting in place, a clear line-of-sight between students' targets and teacher accountability for the progress being made. This is most evident where one-to-one meetings are already in place, such as in the mathematics department.
- Constructing a programme to improve teaching which is becoming bespoke around the needs of individual staff members.

While not all these actions are consistently in place, the direction of travel is established and senior leaders have plans to ensure these become commonplace as quickly as possible. In addition, it is important that governors access training to enable them to use performance data effectively to aid their role in tracking students' progress and holding senior leaders to account. Furthermore, while the academy's marking policy is clear and well-intentioned it is not securely in place across departments. This is limiting the feedback students receive and opportunities are being missed to help them improve their work.

HMI will follow through on the progress of these aspects at a subsequent visit.

External support

Senior leaders have enlisted the involvement of Carmel College and Durham local authority to support improvements in teaching and leadership. This support is well-considered and is being targeted at the right priorities although at an early stage. HMI will track how well this support is promoting better teaching and leadership when the next visit occurs.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely

Tom Grieveson
Her Majesty's Inspector