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Dr Simon Letman
Principal
Holbrook Academy
Ipswich Road
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Dear Dr Letman

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Holbrook Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 6 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 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 all students respond to feedback on their work, so that the accuracy of their spelling and punctuation improves.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders and teachers, and a member of the governing body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I made brief visits to a number of lessons and looked at the way teachers give students feedback about their work. I evaluated the academy's improvement plans and documents relating to the outcomes of monitoring activities and the impact of performance management.

Main findings

You and your senior leaders communicate confidence about the academy's potential, and clarity about what must happen for that potential to be realised. Since the previous inspection, effective teachers have been giving their colleagues precisely-tailored support, in order to help them make progress towards demanding targets. Regular and robust reviews of individual teachers' performance have started to evidence the impact of this support. Information generated by the academy's monitoring systems is also being used to prioritise full reviews of standards in particular subject areas when concerns become evident. Two have taken place since the previous inspection and subsequent rapid and decisive action has been taken to address issues that were identified.

Monitoring of marking indicates that teachers are highlighting errors in students' spelling and punctuation more consistently. Some teachers provide students with opportunities to respond to this feedback by making corrections but not all ensure that this happens consistently. Measures being taken to encourage reading for pleasure, particularly amongst boys, have had significant initial impact and the number of texts borrowed from the Learning Resource Centre has increased sharply.

Leaders are using accurate information on students' progress to set challenging targets. Systems that track students' progress are now being used to identify those who need additional support. Monitoring is enabling leaders to track the impact of interventions and initial evidence suggests that they are having a rapid and positive effect on students' rates of progress.

Governors are working with senior leaders to set ambitious but achievable targets in many areas of the academy's work. They regularly review progress towards those targets, challenge underperformance and work with senior leaders to plan improvements. Governors have initiated consultation on a proposal to extend the length of the academy day, to provide more teaching of literacy and study skills.

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

Subject leaders have started to establish links with their counterparts in other successful academies so that useful ideas and strategies can be shared. This has enabled leaders to check the accuracy and consistency of judgments made about the levels or grades that are awarded to students' work. Leaders spoke positively about the impact of their collaboration with colleagues in other academies.

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

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard
Her Majesty's Inspector