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Mark Mitchley
Principal
Castle Donington College
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Dear Mr Mitchley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Castle Donington College

Following my visit to your school on 14 March 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 school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in April 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 school should take further action to:

- ensure that judgements on teaching quality are underpinned by students' progress over time, and evidence from lesson observations, planning and work scrutiny
- strengthen the quality and consistency of subject leadership, particularly the quality of marking and feedback to students
- establish a calendar of visits and activities for the governing body linked to assessment points and the development plan to enable governors to contribute to self-evaluation
- ensure the accuracy of assessment across all subjects supported by internal and external moderation
- strengthen the development plan by:

- identifying who will evaluate and report on the actions detailed, and when
- identifying link governors who will oversee the monitoring and evaluation of progress against each priority area.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the Vice-Principal with responsibility for improving teaching, four middle leaders, and four representatives of the Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. A telephone discussion took place with the college's improvement adviser. The college development plan was evaluated. A range of documentation was scrutinised including lesson observation records, governing body minutes, reports from the external adviser and monitoring records linked to behaviour and safety. Four lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders.

Context

The new Principal took up his post in January 2014. The interim principal left the college as planned at the end of December. A new Vice-Principal joined the college in September 2013 to lead the college's work on teaching. The head of English left the college in February and was replaced by an existing member of staff. Since the inspection student numbers have fallen by forty six.

Main findings

On arrival the Principal did not waste any time in tackling the areas identified for improvement from the first monitoring visit, in July 2013. The development plan has been revised to focus sharply on priorities highlighted in the inspection report. Attention is given to closing attainment and attendance gaps between students eligible for pupil premium funding and their peers. Success criteria are measurable with clear milestones set to check on progress. It is less clear who will evaluate and report on progress and how members of the governing body will be involved.

Initial steps have been taken to secure an accurate baseline assessment of teaching quality across the college. Leaders are making greater use of evidence from learning walks, progress tracking and book scrutiny to support judgements on the effectiveness of teaching. This remains a priority area to inform personalised training and support. Middle leaders are developing lesson observation and evaluation skills by working alongside senior leaders.

The appointment of a data manager now provides a sharper focus on the use of assessment to identify students who are not making enough progress. Targets have been adjusted across the college to add challenge and raise expectations, supported by regular checks on progress. Progress is increasingly measured from starting points at Key Stage 1. Transition matrices have been introduced recently to track

progress in English and mathematics, in Year 6. There is scope to extend this approach to all classes to ensure that teachers provide an appropriate level of challenge for all groups of students. Subject leaders are now held to account at the 'raising achievement board'. The use of national benchmarks is helping the college to compare performance with national expectations. The college's own data provides an encouraging picture of improvement, particularly for Year 6 students.

External moderation of Key Stage 2 writing indicates an improvement in the accuracy of assessment. Training and joint moderation of standards are planned to further develop teachers' skills and confidence. Leaders recognise the importance of accurate assessment in driving improvement in student achievement. Work is required to ensure the rigour of assessment across all subjects. The use of marking and feedback as a strategy to support students' progress is at an early stage.

The Principal has introduced weekly meetings for subject leaders. This has resulted in a shared understanding of priorities. Staff are supportive of the focus on teaching and learning and welcome the opportunity to work together to share best practice. There is an improved understanding of the role of middle leadership. Systems of accountability are developing well, supported by stronger performance management.

Members of the Governing Body have benefitted from an external review. Their knowledge and understanding of college priorities, student performance and the quality of teaching is developing. They receive good quality information from senior leaders; links are developing with subject leaders. Governors are yet to establish a calendar of visits and activities that enable them to scrutinise student progress information in a timely manner or to review improvements arising from the development plan. Governing Body minutes are not sufficiently detailed to show examples where governors challenge college leaders. This makes it more difficult for them to demonstrate the impact they are making.

External support

Since the last visit the college has commissioned an external adviser to provide an independent view of college effectiveness. Two reports have been completed based on visits and discussions with leaders and governors. Reports provide a fair and accurate picture of recent developments with helpful recommendations. The Principal has secured a link with a Teaching School to improve teaching.

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

Yours sincerely

Nada Trikic
Her Majesty's Inspector