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Miss Kelly McKay & Mr Peter Kingham
Co-Principals
Sherwood E-ACT Academy
Wollaton Avenue
Gedling
Nottingham
NG4 4HX

Dear Miss McKay and Mr Kingham

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sherwood E-ACT Academy

Following my visit to your school on 3 April 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the sponsor are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with yourselves and five middle leaders. I also met with the acting Chair of the Governing Body and the education adviser from E-ACT. These meetings were held in order to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I visited a number of classrooms, spoke to students informally and looked at their work. I examined a range of documentation, including the academy's post-Ofsted action plan, progress and target setting information, governing body minutes, anonymised performance management targets and your records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, one teacher has left and a temporary teacher has been recruited to replace them. A new governor, with considerable experience of working in challenging schools, has also been appointed. The academy sponsor has been working with the Department for Education to identify where it is best placed to make a significant difference to its academies. The future sponsorship arrangements for Sherwood are currently under discussion.

Main findings

You both have high expectations and copious amounts of energy, and are ambitious to move the academy forward at a rapid pace. Your drive and determination are infectious and you have the support of middle leaders. The recent announcement by the sponsor has not distracted leaders from their relentless drive for improvement and it is 'business as usual'. Following the recent inspection, a thorough post-Ofsted action plan was drawn up, to address the key issues. This contains measurable success criteria with clear milestones, including key performance indicators. It is not always clear if different people are responsible for leading and evaluating specific actions.

Leaders have taken decisive action to eradicate inadequate teaching and this is already having an impact. Staff training to improve students' engagement has taken place and records indicate that this aspect of teaching is improving. Faculty leaders are keen to develop their skills; they are carrying out their own faculty reviews and are robustly held to account. They work effectively as a team, are developing confidence and draw on support from each other.

All teachers have additional, differentiated performance targets that allow them to access coaching in their areas of weakness. As a result, teachers are more willing to take risks to improve their teaching and engage their students. They are using a new system, including a class profile, to plan lessons. The quality of marking seen was inconsistent and rarely offered students opportunities to respond. Leaders have identified this in a recent marking scrutiny and acknowledge that improvements are needed. Current data indicate that the pupil premium gap is closing and that a greater percentage of students are making more than expected progress compared to this time last year. These data are rigorously checked both internally and externally.

An external review of governance has been commissioned. Governors are determined to drive the school forward and are growing in their ability to hold leaders to account, but acknowledge that there is still some more to do to ensure that they provide adequate challenge. They are starting to ask challenging questions and are more critical of the answers given. 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

Leaders highly rate the support given by the education adviser from E-ACT. She knows the school well. She effectively supports the development of middle leaders, chairs the Raising Achievement Board and, as such, is responsible for evaluating the impact of actions taken. She has a forensic attention to detail and is focused on any possible areas of slippage. Support for a number of subject teachers has been drawn from E-ACT's commissioning list.

I am copying this letter to the acting Chair of the Governing Body, the Chief Executive Officer for E-ACT and the DfE Academies Advisers Unit.

Yours sincerely

Julia Wright
Her Majesty's Inspector