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Martin Ebbage
Principal
Kirk Hallam Community Technology and Sports College
Godfrey Drive
Kirk Hallam
Ilkeston
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Dear Mr Ebbage

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kirk Hallam Community Technology and Sports College

Following my visit to your academy on 12 May 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report my 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.

This was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

As a result of my visit I have judged that senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The academy should take immediate action to:

- establish accurate systems to judge the quality of the academy's work, so that improvement planning can act on the correct priorities and progress can be suitably measured
- quickly establish agreed best practice for behaviour management, marking and approaches to teaching and assessment that can be implemented consistently by all staff with the aim of bringing the weakest practice up to strength and engendering a healthy professional discussion between staff

- ensure that the external review of governance is promptly arranged and actions taken in response, so that the governing body is able to provide the strategic leadership and level of challenge and support required by the academy.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and the vice-principal, a group of students and the Chair of the Governing Body. I spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority. I also toured some classes with you and evaluated the academy improvement plan.

Context

A new headteacher joined the academy at the start of the Summer term, and had been in post just under two weeks at the time of this visit. The Chair of the Governing Body took up his role last November, and a reorganisation of the governing body committee structure is currently in progress.

Main findings

Because of the imminent arrival of the new principal and the intervention of the Easter holidays, very little actual change has been implemented in response to the inspection. Some changes in governance were already under way, but arrangements have not yet been made to complete the external review of governance and the use of pupil premium funding.

The academy's previous summary of its self-evaluation and the development plan have little relevance to the issues raised by the March inspection. The new principal has not yet had the time to prepare a new self-evaluation or development plan. The academy's existing systems for gathering an accurate picture of the quality of its work are inadequate. Leaders' judgement about the quality of teaching is unrealistically generous and does not match either the students' perceptions or the examination results over the last two years. At present, leaders are unable to identify precise areas of weakness in teaching or leadership, and so cannot devise effective plans to bring about improvement.

My brief observations and discussions with students established that teacher's approaches to behaviour management, marking, planning and teaching vary widely. Good teaching can work reasonably well in this context, but it is clear that the lack of consistency means weaker teachers find it much harder to establish a good classroom climate and approaches that will maximise learning. It also means that often the most vulnerable students do least well and sometimes, their failure is incorrectly attributed to lack of motivation or poor behaviour rather than inappropriate teaching or provision.

Students spoke warmly about the commitment and dedication of their teachers, illustrating with a number of examples of how teachers would spend additional time to ensure senior students properly understood their work and were prepared for their examinations. Relationships are clearly good and most students are very happy to be at the academy. Amongst the younger students, however, poor behaviour was more likely, and not all students had confidence in the academy's approach to dealing with bullying.

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

Since leaving local authority control, the academy has received little by way of external support or monitoring. Close links had been made with the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, but this organisation no longer has the resources to provide the funding and support previously enjoyed by the school. The local authority became aware of a downward trend in examination results about a year ago, but did not notify the governing body.

More recently at the instigation of the new principal, closer links with the local authority have been made and leaders and governors are beginning to look outward for additional support.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Derbyshire County Council, the Education Funding Agency and the Department for Education Academies Advisers Unit.

Yours sincerely

John Peckham
Her Majesty's Inspector`