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Andy Cox
Thorns Community College
Stockwell Avenue
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Dear Mr Cox

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thorns Community College

Following my visit to your school on 26 June 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 month and year. 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 improvement plans show how, when and by whom actions will be monitored, reviewed and evaluated and that this includes governors.
- further develop the marking and assessment policy so that all students know exactly where they are succeeding and what they need to do next to achieve their targets.
- ensure that all middle leaders are fully involved in the process of monitoring the quality of teaching and the progress of pupils in their areas of responsibility.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, students, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans were evaluated. A tour of the school was undertaken and a number of short visits made to classrooms. A work scrutiny was also carried out.

Context

There have been no changes to staffing since the section 5 inspection. However, you have completed a reorganisation of senior leaders to clarify roles and responsibilities in the light of required improvements. Currently there are three temporary members of the extended leadership team who receive a bursary to reflect their additional responsibilities.

Main findings

You are taking effective action to move the school forward. School leaders, governors and staff have responded quickly to the Ofsted inspection judgement, which you recognise as an accurate reflection of the current position.

The school's documentation is well-focused on the improvements required. Plans clearly identify the key objectives to improve outcomes for students, providing success criteria and realistic milestones. However, in some cases there needs to be greater clarity about the specific action/s to be taken to achieve the objective and how actions will be measured for their impact through the cycle of monitoring and review. Those responsible for monitoring and review should include members of the governing body.

As a result of the careful re-organisation of the leadership team, responsibilities and accountability are now very clear at this level. This is less the case at the level of middle leaders, other than leaders of English, mathematics and science. Consequently, not all subject leaders are yet involved in monitoring the quality of teaching and of students' progress at the level that might be expected. This means that currently, too much monitoring is carried out only at senior level. You and your leaders are aware of this and have clear plans to address this aspect of leadership.

You have taken rapid and effective action to address the key issue of improving the quality of teaching. The professional development programme is well-matched to the school's priorities and includes regular opportunities for sharing good practice. For instance, the twilight programme of training is frequently led by teachers with expertise in the focus area.

The implementation of a rigorous cycle of monitoring through the quality assurance programme is already beginning to have an impact. There are very clear processes to address any teaching that is less than good and targeted support is provided to ensure that teachers have every opportunity to improve. Consequently, you report

that teaching has improved, so that more is good or outstanding in the relatively short period since the section 5 inspection.

You have identified where marking and written feedback need to improve and taken the first steps to addressing this. However, further development is required to ensure that the quality and regularity of marking is more consistent. You are now taking action to ensure that students are well informed about their next steps and how these will help them to achieve their targets so that they are encouraged to take responsibility for their own progress.

As a result of improvements to teaching, the school's own information suggests that students currently in Year 11 will achieve significantly better than was the case last year. You and your leaders are keenly aware that gaps in achievement remain and are rightly focusing on actions that will address this over the next academic year, including the appointment of a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator for September.

You have reviewed and improved the systems for managing and monitoring behaviour. There is now a clear approach to dealing with poor behaviour that is being applied with increasing consistency. The school's tracking of behaviour incidents is now much more robust, so that patterns of behaviour can be identified and therefore inform actions taken. You are clear that this will help you achieve your goal of changing behaviour rather than just applying sanctions. Students say that behaviour, particularly in the classroom, has improved as a result. They report that where there are incidents of poor behaviour they are dealt with quickly and effectively.

The governing body is very new, following a long period where the school was overseen by an Interim Executive Board (IEB). The inaugural meeting of the governing body is due to take place next week. However, because a number of IEB members have either moved to the governing body or shadowed the IEB, there is a good knowledge and understanding of the school's main priorities and their current position. Governors are committed to ensuring that the school moves to good as rapidly as possible.

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

The local authority has brokered some support for the school in the past and this year has provided effective consultant support for mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Mel Ford

Her Majesty's Inspector