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Michael Milner
Principal
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Dear Dr Milner

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Wellington Academy

Following my visit to your school on 25 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and sponsors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- make sure subject leaders align their action to improve teaching and learning with the academy improvement plan
- ensure the training of subject leaders provides access to high quality educational research including Ofsted's subject and survey reports
- identify, with the help of student leaders, how to follow up the anti-bullying programme.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, the executive headteacher, your vice principals, the assistant principal for teaching and learning and the directors of English, mathematics and science. I also spoke with a National Leader of

Governance (NLG) and the Chair of the Governing Body. I made brief visits to classrooms to observe students at work and talked with a few students about behaviour in the academy. The school improvement plan and other documents relating to subject and governor's action planning were evaluated. The school's single central record and procedures for safe recruitment were scrutinised.

Context

At the time of the section 5 inspection, there were teaching vacancies in the science and mathematics departments. These have now been filled. A further round of staff restructuring is being undertaken.

Main findings

Your post-inspection action plan focuses sharply on the areas identified in the Ofsted section 5 inspection report. There is a strong link between this plan and the raising achievement plan for the students in Year 11, particularly in addressing the gaps in students' basic literacy and numeracy skills. You have continued to work at getting the conditions right for learning by focusing on improving the quality of teaching so that, at a minimum, it is good across all subjects.

A greater understanding of students' previous attainment, their current achievement and how this compares to national progress measures is being used well to raise expectations of what students can achieve. You hold subject leaders accountable for ensuring that lessons promote ambitious targets for the students. This has been skilfully managed with vice principals overseeing the work of the subject leaders.

Your involvement, and that of your vice principals, in reviewing the progress of students who are most at risk of underachieving sends a very clear signal to staff, students and parents about the importance you place on the high aspirations of the academy. The vice principals have a good knowledge of the steps core subject leaders are taking to improve teaching and learning. However, the three subject leaders I spoke with do not all share the same priorities for improving learning in lessons as those expressed in the school improvement plan. Not all are clear enough about what will secure good and outstanding learning in their subjects. These factors detract from the main teaching priorities identified in the school improvement plan.

The assistant principal for teaching and learning has made a significant impact on spreading good and outstanding practice and provides determined support for those teachers whose teaching is not yet good. The approach taken has fired the determination of good teachers to become even better. Frequent visits to lessons, looking at students' work and regular reviews of students' performance has led to a greater consistency in lesson planning, marking and feedback to students. These actions are helping to speed up the rate that students make progress.

While the impact of teaching on learners is still a mixed picture across the academy, teachers are confidently focusing on how well students are learning in their lessons. In this respect, teaching has turned a corner. The depth and quality of questions asked of students has improved. There are still lessons when the discussion and dialogue with students is not of a quality to secure students' complete engagement and deepen their understanding.

Governors are drawing well upon outside support from a National Leader in Governance. They have moved quickly to clarify their roles and accountabilities and engage with the school leaders to support and challenge them to drive improvement across the academy. Governors are much better placed to evaluate for themselves the impact of the work of school leaders on students and staff.

The procedures and policies for safeguarding boarding students have been reviewed and are now fit for purpose.

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 collaboration from Wellington College is encouraging. The support of Wellington College staff for the training programme provides practical help to teachers wishing to improve their practice. The weekly Saturday school and Easter school give valuable opportunities for students who are close to achieving a good pass in both English and mathematics to have additional lessons. The visiting student programme between the college and the academy is successfully encouraging students to seek out more opportunities in the wider curriculum.

Your vice principal is optimistic about the contribution of an anti-bullying programme, run by Humanitopia, on students' moral and social development. The intentions are not in question, but the follow up to the sessions needs strengthening so that the primary messages, fully endorsed by students, are sustained.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, and the DfE Academies Advisers Unit and the sponsor, Wellington College.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Palk
Her Majesty's Inspector