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Ms Helena Boast
Headteacher
The Thomas Lord Audley School
Monkwick Avenue
Monkwick
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Dear Ms Boast

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Thomas Lord Audley School

Following my visit to your academy on 11 September 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in April 2014. 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 academy should take further action to:

- reduce further the incidence of low-level disruption during lessons
- monitor the impact of work to improve the skills of those students who join the school with very low levels of literacy
- increase the attendance of students supported by the pupil premium.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders and teachers, and two members of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I made brief visits to a number of lessons, during which I spoke with students, and looked at the way teachers give students feedback about their work. I evaluated the academy's improvement plans and documents relating to the outcomes of monitoring activities and the impact of performance management.

Context

Since the previous inspection, new appointments have been made to the teaching staff. There have been changes to subject leadership, and additional senior leadership appointments have been made. A number of teachers have left the academy.

Main findings

Together with other senior colleagues, you are working effectively to bring about the necessary changes outlined within the academy's ambitious, but realistic, improvement plans. Recent poor GCSE results in some subjects reflect a legacy of ineffective teaching, the limited literacy skills of many students, and low expectations on the part of some teachers. You are uncompromising in pursuing improvements in each of these areas; senior and subject leaders are working effectively together to drive up standards in all subjects. Some difficult decisions have been taken where careful checks indicate that standards have not been high enough. These, together with the support given to all colleagues, have led to recent improvements in the quality of teaching. The early impact of this work is evident in the faster progress younger students are making.

Teachers in all subjects are reinforcing the essentials of spelling, punctuation and grammar during lessons, and when they mark students' work. They are showing students how to present their ideas and arguments effectively, and meet the demands different types of question place upon them, when writing at length. All teachers are reinforcing clear expectations regarding the presentation of students' work. Subject leaders have adapted courses, so that students practise these skills regularly. Most now act on the detailed feedback they receive, and are making faster progress as a result. Those who join the school with very low reading ages are being given more intensive support, but the full impact of this recently-introduced initiative is not yet clear.

Good behaviour in lessons is promoted through a new, and popular, reward system. As a result, the incidence of low level disruption, though still too high, is declining, as is the frequency with which students are removed from class because of persistent poor behaviour. Levels of attendance, overall, continue to rise because the academy is working effectively with most parents, but the attendance rates of those supported by the pupil premium remain below that of their peers.

Governors are rigorous in holding academy leaders to account, and have made effective arrangements to monitor the impact of work towards the improvement plan objectives. The local authority is helping governors review the impact of pupil premium spending over the duration of this academic year.

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

Local authority representatives have helped the academy's leaders to check standards, and ensure that judgements about student progress and the quality of teaching are accurate. Subject leaders appreciate the opportunity to share ideas to improve teaching and learning, and raise achievement, with colleagues at a local secondary academy, and other schools that are part of the North East Essex Education Partnership.

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

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard
Her Majesty's Inspector