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

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kirk Hallam Community Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 23 September 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.

The visit was the second 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.

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

- regularly check and evaluate the changes introduced since March, to ensure that they continue to be consistently applied by all staff and, that where possible, approaches are refined and improved
- alongside the planned review of the curriculum, undertake a detailed review and development of teaching strategies to ensure that the most effective approaches are being regularly and confidently used in the academy.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy head teachers, seven members of the governing body, a group of subject leaders and a group of students, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I toured lessons taking place across the

academy with you and looked at available books and marking. I also evaluated the academy improvement plan and recent GCSE examination results.

Main findings

The GCSE examination results for the academy in 2014 showed a very sharp drop in performance compared to previous years. The proportion of Year 11 gaining five or more passes at A*-C including English and mathematics fell from 63% to 43%, and the proportions making expected progress in English fell from 66% to 54% and from 69% to 58% in mathematics. Boys performed particularly badly and the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged students and others was inconsistent across different subjects. Teachers accurately predicted these results and have now recognised that the academy has placed insufficient emphasis on the progress students need to make from their starting points over their full time in the academy. The 2014 examination results in the sixth form were not significantly different from the national averages in all subjects.

However, the academy leadership, governing body and staff now have a much more accurate picture of the quality of learning and provision at Kirk Hallam than at my last visit. Leaders have undertaken a full review of the teaching, observing every teacher and also scrutinising students' books and progress information. The teachers were all given detailed, diagnostic feedback and professional development around identified areas for improvement is now planned. Some teachers described this as the first time they had received such helpful analysis of their teaching. Teachers were also very appreciative of the much more visible presence of senior leaders around the school, supporting and promoting good behaviour.

Better systems to monitor the progress of students have been introduced. New policies to promote good behaviour and ensure consistency of marking and homework have also been set up. Whilst it is early in the new school year to give a definite view about their effectiveness, staff and students were positive about how behaviour had improved. Several students said that it was now more difficult to get away with unacceptable behaviour and welcomed a consistent enforcement of requirements such as homework deadlines. Concerns about inconsistent tackling of bullying issues, expressed at my last meeting with students, were no longer present.

The governing body has taken very seriously the need to be much better informed about the academy's progress and to become more closely involved. A restructure of committees has taken place and an external review of the effectiveness of governance and use of the pupil premium is currently in progress. The governing body has also taken a proactive approach to recruiting new governors to current vacancies, undertaking a skills audit to identify gaps in expertise that will need to be filled by new governors.

During my walk through lessons with you, we jointly observed that many staff were clearly nervous and had retreated to teaching methods that were less effective and

engaging than you had observed on previous observations. Some were also just beginning to get used to the new marking and behaviour policies and inconsistencies in application were observed. A teaching and learning group is in the process of being established and hopes to promote more effective and confident teaching that will provide greater excitement and enthusiasm from students.

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

The academy has joined the George Spencer Teaching School Alliance and is using these links to promote effective staff development. Following the recent poor examination performance, the local authority has written a warning letter to the Governing Body. Governors recognise their urgent need to ensure that they receive high quality external advice to support them in their role of holding school leaders fully to account.

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.

Yours sincerely

John Peckham
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Local authority – including where the academy is an academy
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the academy has a sixth form
- DfE - Academies Advisers Unit [open.FREESCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk] - for academies, free schools, UTCs and studio schools
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school is a non-maintained special school [hns.efa@education.gsi.gov.uk]