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Mr P Elliot
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Elliot

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bridgwater College Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 25 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 May 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.

Evidence

To evaluate the action taken since the last inspection, meetings were held with you, senior leaders, members of the governing body and a consultant working with the academy. I undertook a series of short visits to lessons in the secondary phase, looked at students' books and a range of documentation about the quality of teaching and students' achievement throughout the academy. The academy's improvement plans were also evaluated.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection changes have been made to leadership roles and responsibilities. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed in the primary phase. Two teachers are on the Teach First Programme. Three new Intervention Mentor posts have been created to work with specific groups of students in the secondary phase. There is a supernumerary teacher to provide one-to-one support and small group interventions for Year 6 students. In addition, the extended academy day, known as lesson five, has been redesigned. A new academy wide assessment framework has replaced the National Curriculum Levels.

Main findings

The school has devised and implemented high quality action plans to drive improvement. The closely integrated plans, covering all areas of the school's work and robust performance management systems provide a solid bedrock to ensure everyone involved with the academy is held firmly accountable for their own work and those they manage. It was clear from our visits to lessons and the work seen in the students' books that lesson planning has improved. Teachers' guidance to students enabling them to improve their work is now firmly rooted in practice. The refreshed academy values were evidenced in all classrooms and communal areas we visited. The theme 'in the pursuit of excellence' lays a clear common goal, which has been embraced by those who work and learn here.

More responsibility for improving teaching has been delegated to subject and aspect leaders. To support them in this work all staff with extra pay allowances for a Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) are now enrolled on appropriate training to broaden their knowledge and understanding of effective leadership. In addition, those new to their roles have a mentor of high quality from the academy leadership team.

Due to the extensive amount of assessment information ('can do' statements) created by the new assessment structure the academy has sensibly moved to an electronic data collection system. Again, responsibility and accountability for measuring students' progress has rightly shifted to subject and aspect leaders.

Lesson observations are not used to provide a 'snap shot' of teaching, but as an effective way of sharing good and outstanding practice across the academy. The introduction of individual Personalised Learning Checklists (PLC) is helping students move smoothly from the junior phase of the academy to the senior phase.

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 Local Governing Body is in the process of completing an audit of the members' skills and levels of experience. It is using this information to review roles and responsibilities, along with identifying individual training needs. It is getting good external support from the multi-academy trust and other governing bodies of local schools. There are firm plans for further training to take place to ensure that new members, or those who have new roles, will be effectively equipped to challenge and to support the academy. In addition, the academy is already working closely with neighbouring schools, the other academies within the multi-academy trust and an external consultant to secure further improvement. This is already successfully supporting students when they move from the primary schools to Bridgwater College Academy, and when they leave Bridgwater College Academy to join Bridgwater College.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Somerset and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector