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Geraldine Davies
Principal
The UCL Academy
Adelaide Road
Camden
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Dear Ms Davies

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The UCL Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 1 October 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. The academy should take further action to:

- include the findings of the external reviews of governance and pupil premium in immediate revisions to the Ofsted action plan.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, your assistant Principals, the human resource manager, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and a middle leader to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. You accompanied me on a short tour of the academy during which we made brief visits to lessons. I spoke with a group of students and examined a sample of their work. I evaluated the academy's internal performance information, minutes of governing body and sponsor meetings, and the academy and local authority action plans.

Context

Since the last inspection, eight teachers have left the academy. Three newly qualified teachers, 19 experienced teachers, and seven support staff have started. The academy has admitted a further 243 students.

Main findings

This is an academy which is taking swift, incisive action to improve. Leaders have responded constructively to the outcomes of the last inspection, and have worked together in a determined way to ensure rapid early improvement in the areas identified.

You have an extremely clear understanding of the improvements needed and you have produced a skilled and accurate action plan. The interim steps within the plan enable you, the governors and the sponsor to thoroughly check on the academy's progress. The planned monthly impact statements provide a quick but thorough health check for all.

Governors' abilities to offer effective support and challenge to the academy are fast improving. They quickly commissioned the external review of governance and have already responded with vigour to the inspection findings. For example, they have revised their terms of reference which are sharper, enabling them to hold leaders to account more readily. They now need to link more closely areas for improvement in the action plan to individual governors. This has begun and should be strengthened in line with the findings of the recently published external review of governance and that of the pupil premium. Governors will be more able to check on the impact the of the academy's work through planned better professional administration for its meetings.

Leaders have taken equally swift action in revising the academy's assessment policy. The leaders in English exude confidence and deep-rooted subject knowledge. They believe the strengthened assessment policy provides a far better way of tracking students' progress. The rigour and consistency at the heart of the new policy is tangible. Leaders speak with confidence about the 'I can' statements and this confidence is shared by students. Students know how to use the statements across all subjects and their written work evidences this well.

Marking is rapidly improving. The common use of 'Follow Up Time' is a real strength. Staff and students have quickly seen the sense of the simple but highly effective system and books show its use is rapidly spreading. However, it is not used consistently in all subjects all of the time.

Students are motivated by the shift in teachers' planning. Tasks are varied, challenging and structured around the learning needs of individuals. As one Year 9 student said, 'the variety cancels out the chore of repetition'. The academy is making more effective use of learning support assistants. They support the nurture wing very well and work closely with subject teachers challenging the progress of students in all subjects, including in mathematics. This better deployment results in faster progress being made by almost all groups of students, including those with special educational needs.

You and other leaders have improved the ways you check on students' progress. For example, the increased frequency and sharper use of performance information is making teachers and learning support assistants more accountable. Teachers are using assessment information well and so plan better, properly targeted work for students.

The significant improvement in the academy's 2014 A-level results is promising. Analysis produced by the academy and their expert external adviser, indicates that outcomes are good for all students. The academy has quickly put right the problems experienced by sixth form students in 2013.

Achievement rates for students in Key Stage 3 are rapidly improving, and for most groups. Better quality teaching, marking and assessment are leading to stronger attainment and progress. The gap between the performance of disadvantaged students and others continues to narrow. The academy has robust plans for intervention and support for those students who have yet to make secure progress. Actions resulting from the external review of the pupil premium have already made a difference for those students.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspections.

External support

The academy has secured access to a wide range of well-targeted external support. The support provided by the local authority is of great assistance. For instance, the local authority's review of the English faculty and the setting up of the local English curriculum leaders' network has been extremely valuable.

The academy is making effective use of a highly skilled school improvement partner along with a number of expert consultants. They bring a wealth of experience and knowledge which is accelerating the academy's improvement. For example, the work of the expert consultant in the academy's better use of performance data is already making a difference.

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

Yours sincerely

Debbie Clinton

Her Majesty's Inspector