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Gee Cook
Principal
Iceni Academy
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Dear Ms Cook

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Iceni Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 16 December 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 September 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

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, your vice-principal, two governors and a representative of the Academy Transformation Trust to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The academy improvement and development plan was evaluated. An opportunity to walk the senior academy and sixth form with your vice-principal enabled me to see students at work in lessons.

Context

Staffing, the number of students and the academy's status are unchanged since the last inspection.

Main findings

You have put in place detailed plans to improve the academy and raise the aspirations of its staff and of students. You are using these plans to closely monitor and evaluate the progress you and your staff are making in securing improvements. You, your senior leadership team and governors feel there is nothing preventing the academy from being judged good at its next inspection.

To achieve this, you are rightly prioritising improving the quality of teaching. Expectations of staff are higher. They have new targets to meet linked to the outcomes achieved by their students. Weekly learning walks and formal lesson observations are identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each faculty and informing where additional support and challenge is needed.

Recent training provided for staff is encouraging them to use their interactive whiteboards, vary their questioning of students and mark books more regularly. Marking is becoming more systematic but it is not tackling poor presentation or correcting basic spelling and grammatical errors in all subjects. Not all teachers encourage students to take enough pride in the quality of their books.

Staff training has prioritised the promotion of students learning together, in groups, but the impact of this is not very noticeable in lessons. Most staff teach the whole class together. This slows the learning and progress of some students because only a few of them engage fully during questioning and too many are left unchallenged. Further training for teachers is planned for next term, tailored to their individual needs.

Teachers continue to set high expectations of students' behaviour. In most lessons, students are attentive and engaged in learning. However, teachers' expectations of what students are capable of achieving are still not high enough. My brief look at students' books in lessons confirmed that not all teachers demand high quality work from them or challenge students when work is untidy or left unfinished.

Changes have been made to raise achievement in English. The IGCSE qualification has been introduced and an external consultant deployed within the faculty to provide support for the subject leader and his team of teachers. Across the academy, further improvements are needed to the learning environment. Only a few classrooms have bright, stimulating displays to motivate, inform and celebrate students' good work, and some are untidy.

All students have been set aspirational targets. These are recorded in their books in graphical form to illustrate whether they are on track to meet their targets. Assessment data collected every half-term is shared with parents and carers, and is

closely analysed by your faculty leaders. They are given time to review the data and moderate the assessments made by teachers. This is providing a detailed overview of the progress made by individual students in Year 11 and in the sixth form. These procedures do not extend into the younger year groups. During my visits to lessons it was evident that very few teachers use this assessment information to plan learning suited to the different abilities of students. It remains unclear how teachers are ensuring that more able students are being fully challenged.

You, your governors and sponsor rightly prioritise improving the sixth form. Your vice-principal and another senior leader have taken full responsibility for its growth and for improving the provision and outcomes for students. The views of Year 11 students have been surveyed to find out the type of courses they wish to pursue and this information is being used to design a suitable curriculum for 2015. Plans are also under way to refurbish parts of the academy to provide sixth form students with their own dedicated study area and computing facilities.

The governing body knows where the strengths and weaknesses lie in teaching. They feel that more time is needed to see the full impact of recent staff training, and to evaluate the effectiveness of new leaders of some faculties. Regular updates from some, but not all faculty leaders enable governors to ask challenging questions about the improvements they are making. They feel that the progress data you share with governors enables them to ask challenging questions of you and your senior leaders to ensure that improvements are made.

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 sponsor has a realistic view of the academy's effectiveness. It feels that the appointment of a vice-principal and other new staff has strengthened the quality of teaching and leadership, and that you and your senior leaders are securing the necessary improvements. Your Academy Improvement Director monitors the quality of teaching with you each half-term and regularly scrutinises assessment data to keep the Trust informed of the academy's development. This also helps to validate your own views about the quality of teaching and students' progress. They have brokered additional support from within the Trust and from external consultants to support the academy's work.

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

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc. Chair of the Governing Body
cc. Local authority