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Mr Howard Kemp
Headteacher
Farringdon Community Academy
Allendale Road
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Dear Mr Kemp

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Farringdon Community Academy, Sunderland

Following my visit to your academy on 13 January 2015, 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 school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school 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. The school should take further action to:

- Further develop the expertise of governors so that they are more able to hold leaders to account for the progress that the academy is making. Governors should make their judgements about the academy through analysis of a range of evidence as well as from the information they receive from the senior leadership team.
- Further develop the expertise of middle leaders so that they are more able to hold their teams to account for the quality of teaching, marking and assessment. Middle leaders should be clearer in their understanding of their roles in ensuring that all students make the progress that they should.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and senior leadership team and two members of the governing body. Further meetings were held with middle leaders and the whole staff. A telephone conversation took place with the Chair of Governors. Several documents were scrutinised including the academy's action plan, the external review of governance and governor meeting minutes.

Main findings

Governors and senior leaders are taking the right steps to tackle the weaknesses identified in the inspection report. The improvement plan provides clear strategic direction for the work being done and contains appropriate benchmarks to check on progress. However, the plan does not identify clearly who is responsible for each action and who is responsible for assessing the impact of these actions.

Leaders are moving more promptly to address weaknesses in teaching because they are more rigorous in their assessment of teachers' work. They are now drawing on a wider range of evidence rather than relying solely on what they see in classrooms. This wider evidence includes more regular and detailed review of students' work books and folders, now done jointly with middle leaders, with greater attention being paid to what students say about their work and their experiences in the academy. Both senior and middle leaders are using these insights and assessments to ensure that staff are held to account and staff training focuses very precisely on improving the quality of teaching and the feedback they provide for students about their work.

Senior leaders are now ensuring that the academy's capacity to track students' progress and monitor their behaviour across subjects and departments is more rigorous. This is due to more regular and more insightful analysis of data. Senior and middle leaders now meet regularly to analyse this data and other information about students so that they can identify 'gaps' in students' performance and move swiftly to address them. While the introduction of this more rigorous approach is recent, it offers a potentially powerful tool to search out underachievement, identify weaknesses in particular subjects and year groups and target interventions.

Governors demonstrate a clear understanding of the weaknesses identified in the inspection report and are acting effectively to address them. Their work is being helped by the accurate information being provided for them by the headteacher. This is underpinning their capacity to challenge academy staff about students' performance and progress against action plan priorities. The recent reorganisation of the governors' committee structure and the linking of individual and pairs of governors with particular subject areas have helped this process. However, more needs to be done to widen the range of sources from which governors draw their evidence about the academy's progress so that they can be fully confident that the information they receive is accurate.

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

External support

The academy is receiving effective support from Durham Education Development Services. Durham EDS has undertaken a review of governance and is supporting senior and middle leaders in their work in ensuring consistency in teachers' assessment of students' work. The academy has very recently developed a link with St Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy, a local outstanding school, to further improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, it is too early to assess the impact of this.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Evans
Her Majesty's Inspector