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Debbie Morrison
Kingsthorpe College
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Kingsthorpe
Northampton
NN2 7HR

Dear Mrs Morrison

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kingsthorpe College

Following my visit to your school on 16 March 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 third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the sponsor, and your academy improvement partner to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated data provided by senior leaders on student progress and on the quality of teaching in the academy, including the performance management system. You took me on a tour of the academy and we visited several classrooms to see the learning that was taking place.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in June 2014, two senior leaders have left the academy. In addition, 16 teachers have left the academy and 19 teachers have joined the school. There has been an extensive re-structuring of the senior leadership team and several members of staff are working in new roles or have new responsibilities.

Main findings

You have made many changes at senior leadership level, mainly in terms of responsibilities rather than personnel. Individual leaders have risen to the challenges you have set them. They are very focused on their roles, they have clear and extensive understanding of how to fulfil their duties and they can clearly demonstrate evidence of the impact of much of their work.

A greater proportion of students achieved five A*-C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics in 2014 than in previous years. This reflects the work of all staff to improve the quality of teaching. Academy data show that this improvement is set to continue for this year's students, particularly in English. As a result of your work with disadvantaged students they are making better progress than in previous years and the gap between them and their peers is closing. You are aware that teachers need to challenge more effectively the academy's most-able students.

Sixth form students are making more progress than they were, though this improvement is much more evident in Year 12 than it is in Year 13. All Year 12 students who re-took GCSE English this year have been successful. You have set more demanding entry criteria for sixth form students than previously and students are now encouraged to take a more manageable amount of qualifications. This prevents them over-stretching themselves and subsequently underachieving, as some students previously did. There is a more aspirational ethos in the sixth form. This is reflected in the fact that one in four students have offers from Russell Group universities.

The academy's progress data is more accurate than it was. You and your colleagues have designed a much improved system where everyone involved in a student's education can identify and react to potential underachievement quickly. You have ensured that the programme of interventions is more coherent than it was at the time of the last inspection. The data are more accurate because there are many members of staff, several of them senior leaders, who ensure that the systems in place to validate assessment information are followed. Members of academy staff would, however, benefit from receiving external moderation of the accuracy of their data.

You have ensured that the system by which teachers' performance is managed is more robust. Staff changes along with the support and training provided to teachers, have contributed to an improvement in the quality of teaching in the academy. The written feedback teachers give students has improved greatly since my previous visit in June 2014. I saw some excellent examples of detailed and formative marking, particularly in English, and this is having a positive impact on the progress that students make.

The system for quality assuring the work of teachers has improved. These activities are now regular and robust.

Since the previous inspection, two governors have resigned and five have joined the governing body. The governing body now has the maximum number of governors permitted and it uses a professional clerk. The Chair of the Governing Body has continued his influential work. He, along with you, has carried out a governance audit. This has helped to ensure clarity and direction for governors. The chair meets with you on a fortnightly basis and offers the necessary balance of challenge and support. Governors have created more efficient systems by which to monitor and plan the academy's finances.

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's sponsor, Collaborative Academies Trust, understands the needs of the school well and offers challenge and support to ensure improvements in performance. This has been most clearly demonstrated through establishing a strong governing body, partly through the trust's development of a framework for effective governance which pulls together best practice research in this area. The trust has commissioned a school improvement adviser to work with the academy on a termly basis and you find this to be of benefit.

Senior representatives of the sponsor keep in touch with you on a fortnightly basis and more formally through termly meetings where they hold you to account for student achievement and other aspects of the academy's performance. The sponsor has been particularly helpful in providing human resources support.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian McNeilly
Her Majesty's Inspector