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24 March 2015

Geoff Renwick
William Brookes School
Farley Road
Much Wenlock
TF13 6NB

Dear Mr Renwick

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to William Brookes School

Following my visit with Linda McGill HMI to your academy on 23 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 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 January 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The focus of this visit was expanded to make sure that safeguarding and child protection arrangements were appropriate.

While 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:

- Develop a more rigorous approach to the monitoring of teaching across the academy which involves all subject leaders so that
 - judgements made include subject related information
 - where weaknesses are identified this is used by subject leaders to plan further support that may be needed.

- Take urgent action to improve the academy's literacy strategy by
 - introducing checks on students' reading ability so that weak readers across the academy are identified quickly
 - taking prompt action to make sure students catch up with their reading using a phonics (the sounds letters make) approach.

- Refine the post-Ofsted action plan so that it becomes a more strategic tool for governors to use in holding senior leaders to account and which they can use to identify if improvements are happening quickly enough
- Make improvements to the child protection policy to make sure it fully meets requirements and ensure the new policy is published on the academy website.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other leaders, representatives from the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The post-Ofsted action plan was evaluated and a work scrutiny activity was carried out with senior leaders with a focus on the most-able students in Year 9. An inspector met with the local authority designated officer for child protection arrangements and checks were carried out of records related to keeping students safe.

Context

Since the inspection, a new Deputy Headteacher has been appointed who will start in September 2015. This additional senior leader will increase the capacity of senior leaders to monitor the work of the academy and ensure improvements take place as quickly as possible. The academy is currently recruiting an assistant subject leader in mathematics and a subject leader for geography.

Main findings

Leaders and governors have continued to work on the areas requiring improvement identified from their own evaluations of the work of the academy. Although actions taken cover the areas for improvement from the inspection, further work is needed to support the academy in its journey to becoming a good or outstanding academy.

Teachers' assessments in English are more accurate as a result of English teachers working with an external moderator. Mock examinations for Year 11 students have been marked externally and, together with other assessment information, senior leaders and governors now have more reliable information to provide an indication of likely outcomes in English in 2015. Improvements made to the delivery of controlled assessments in science means teachers have a greater understanding of their role in supporting this process. Mathematics requires further work to develop assessments for Year 9 students which identify if students have the necessary problem solving skills and are able to reason well enough to be sufficiently prepared to start the new GCSE in September 2015.

Teachers are supported in improving their practice through opportunities to work with other teachers to address areas of weakness identified through senior leaders' observations of teaching. This strategy is not being implemented as well as it might and senior leaders discussed concerns about finding time for this work. A sharper focus on the teachers who require support the most may be more effective. Training has recently been delivered in improving lesson planning. Teachers are encouraged to develop activities that are more appropriate to the needs of students by identifying what students can already do to avoid unnecessary repetition and to make sure students are more challenged in their work. This is in the early stages of introduction and some inconsistencies were seen in the work of students in mathematics where some more-able students were sometimes given work which was too easy for them. Inconsistencies in marking continue and training in improving marking and the way students respond to this is planned to take place shortly.

Academy leaders are developing their use of assessment data to enable them to identify particular groups who are at risk of underachievement. This is not yet as effective as it could be because academy leaders do not use knowledge of students' starting points well enough to identify which students are less likely than others to make the progress they should, and to intervene to make sure these students catch up with their similar ability peers nationally. Consultations on approaches to assessment without levels have started. The English department are already trialling an approach using the new GCSE grades which they have matched to students' work to monitor progress from Year 7 through to Year 11.

Monitoring of the quality of teaching is taking place but information gathered from these activities is not yet being used well enough. Subject leaders do not routinely observe teaching and learning in their subject area or take part in checks on students' work to identify, for example, if all teachers are delivering topics in the same way and with an appropriate level of challenge. Senior leaders look at students' work to check that academy marking policies are being followed, but this is not yet sufficiently integrated with the subject leaders' monitoring roles. Senior leaders' judgements made on the quality of teaching do not therefore provide enough information to improve students' learning in all subject areas. Subject leaders need to be more involved in this process.

The literacy strategy across the academy is at a very early stage of introduction and students are not routinely tested when they start in the academy to identify if their reading level is presenting a barrier to their learning. No use is made of a phonics strategy to make sure they catch up quickly. Key Stage 4 students should be tested urgently and the weakest readers given the opportunity to improve their reading to avoid this impacting on their performance in examinations.

The post-Ofsted action plan requires further refinement to make clear who is responsible for implementing the different actions, who is responsible for monitoring and who will evaluate the impact; and clear dates as to when these steps will

happen. Governors are not in a position to use the plan in its current form to hold leaders to account or to see if the academy is improving quickly enough.

There are no major concerns regarding the policies and procedures related to safeguarding. The child protection policy has been updated to reflect the most recent statutory guidance and all staff have been appropriately trained. Child protection procedures should therefore be clear to staff but the child protection policy does not include the phone number that staff can use to make a direct referral to childrens' social care should they need it. Links between the child protection policy and other relevant policies are not made clear such as bullying and whistleblowing. The procedure for managing allegations against staff is unclear nor is it clear what to do should a child make an allegation against another child or a volunteer. These changes need to be made urgently.

Additional training is required for teaching assistants who work with the most vulnerable students in the 'Golden Group' so that they understand better how to support these students and to help them to overcome barriers to their learning.

Attendance is improving across the academy as a result of prompt follow up by staff with responsibilities in this area. Attendance at alternative provision is checked and there is evidence of good partnership work involving external agencies.

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 academy has drawn on some support for key areas using external consultants. Subject leaders would benefit from the opportunity to work with colleagues in good or outstanding schools and academies in developing a more rigorous approach to monitoring the work in their areas. Further support and challenge may be available through the local authority, and this would be welcomed to make sure the academy moves forwards quickly.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Shropshire local authority name and as below.

Yours sincerely

Denah Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
hns.efa@education.gsi.gov.uk
- For academies CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk