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Mr Robert Howard
Headteacher
Heanor Gate Science College
Kirkley Drive
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Dear Mr Howard

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Heanor Gate Science College

Following my visit to your school on 25th 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 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, I held meetings with you, the Vice Chair of the Governing Body, the school improvement partner, the Chief Executive Officer from the Spencer Academies Trust (SAT) and the local leader of education (LLE). These meetings were held in order to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I carried out a work scrutiny with the subject leaders for English and mathematics. I visited a number of classrooms, spoke with students informally and looked at their work. I examined a range of documentation, including the academy's improvement plan, analysis of your recent data and minutes of governing body meetings.

Context

Since the inspection a deputy headteacher has left and not been replaced. Two assistant headteachers have joined the school, one on a temporary contract and one on secondment from a local academy. A learning resources manager has also commenced work.

Main findings

School leaders have continued to drive forward rapid improvements since the inspection. Your school improvement plan is highly focused on the areas for improvement identified by the recent section 5 inspection. It includes appropriate milestones and success criteria. Responsibilities for monitoring and evaluation are clear.

Students in the current Year 11 are predicted to make progress, above national levels in English, mathematics and science in 2015. The subject leader for English has worked closely with her counterpart at one of the SAT schools, to support leadership and teaching. Teachers' assessments in English are increasingly accurate and they have a detailed understanding of how to address students' learning needs. Academy leaders have trialled a number of initiatives to improve the progress of boys, including more use of competitive activities. There has been some success in accelerating the achievement of the most-able boys, but overall boys' achievement still lags behind that of girls. School leaders acknowledge that more work needs to be done to accelerate the progress of students in Key Stage 3.

Recent staff training has focused appropriately on strategies for improving the progress of students eligible for the pupil premium funding. Staff now routinely mark their books first, give careful consideration to where they are seated in the class and ensure that they use more targeted questioning. These strategies are paying off and Year 11 students, eligible for pupil premium funding, are now predicted to be only half a grade behind their peers, in both English and mathematics.

The quality of teaching is continuing to improve, although remains stronger in Key Stage 4 than in the younger year groups. During my tour of the school I saw a small number of incidents where Key Stage 3 students' attitudes to learning were less than good. Subject leaders now have much greater responsibility for the quality of teaching in their areas. Teachers have more opportunities, through staff training, and meeting time, to share good practice both within and between departments. Marking is good and some is exemplary. Teachers give students constructive advice about how to improve their work and make time for them to do so. Importantly, teachers in English and mathematics give careful consideration to which piece of work requires less marking and which requires more detailed assessment, to bring about rapid improvement in students' work.

Governors are becoming increasingly effective. They have had recent training in data and their minutes demonstrate particularly effective challenge in this area. The school improvement partner, continues to provide appropriate support to governors, and accompanies them on their monitoring visits to the school. Governors are aware

of their responsibilities in checking statutory policies. They are well informed about the use of pupil premium funding and its effectiveness. However their knowledge of the use of catch-up spending and its impact is less secure.

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 support provided by the SAT is highly valued and appropriately tailored to make the best possible use of expertise from within the SAT and locally. There has been some recent unavoidable staff absence in the senior team. The headteacher, in conjunction with the SAT, took decisive action to recruit two temporary senior leaders to ensure continuity and consistency of leadership. A local leader of education also provides effective support to senior and subject leaders and acts as an external partner in the school's quality assurance processes.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Derbyshire, the Education Funding Agency and the Chief Executive Officer for the Spencer Academies Trust.

Yours sincerely

Julia Wright
Her Majesty's Inspector