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27 March 2015

Mr G Watson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Watson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Tewkesbury School

Following my visit to your academy on 26 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. Please pass my thanks on to the governors, teaching staff and students I met during my visit.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy 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. At its previous section 5 inspection in July 2013 the school was also judged to require improvement.

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 the headteacher, other senior leaders, two heads of faculty, a head of house, students and members of the Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The academy's plans for improvement and current achievement data were discussed and evaluated. A series of lesson observations was undertaken with a member of the academy's senior leadership team. The inspector looked at students' work and discussed it with them. The inspector also met with the academy's 'junior leadership team'. This group, that includes students from Years 7 to 13, acts as the 'executive' for all of the student representative groups in the academy.

Context

There have been no changes in senior leadership. The academy appointed a new head of the mathematics faculty in September 2014, who subsequently left the academy at the end of the autumn term. Temporary arrangements are in place until a new head of mathematics takes up post in September 2015. There have been several other changes to the teaching staff.

Main findings

The leaders of the academy are doing everything they can to ensure that it is judged to be good at its next inspection. The headteacher, senior leaders and the Governing Body have a clear and accurate view of what the academy does well and what needs to be improved further. Heads of faculty (curriculum leaders) and other key middle leaders, such as the heads of house, have also undertaken an accurate evaluation of their area of responsibility. The actions taken since the first inspection that judged the academy to require improvement in July 2013 have led to sustained improvements against all of the points raised in the inspection report. When the final results are taken into account, the achievement of Year 11 students at the end of the 2013/14 academy year showed marked improvement from the previous year and compared favourably with national averages. The achievement of sixth form students in 2014 was in line with national averages.

The academy has continued to improve since the November 2014 inspection, building well on the previous actions. The academy's own data shows a further increase in all aspects of achievement for all groups of students and across a wide range of subjects. Any gaps in achievement between particular groups of students have narrowed significantly. For example, the achievement of disadvantaged students in the academy in English is in line with that of those who are not disadvantaged nationally. In mathematics, this gap has narrowed significantly. Senior and curriculum leaders carry out rigorous checks of the accuracy of progress and achievement data which is also checked independently. They are also challenged well by governors who analyse the most recent data before their meetings with the headteacher and other senior leaders. The inspector was able to verify the accuracy of the academy's data by looking at a sample of students' current and recent work.

Achievement in the sixth form is broadly in line with national averages across most subjects. The sixth form leader is fully aware of a small number of subjects where further improvement is needed and the teachers in these subjects are receiving good support. Where necessary, links have been made with other schools to provide the specific subject support needed. The academy is less clear about why, in some subjects, students with similar starting points achieve very different outcomes. Formal checks on students' progress are carried out about every six weeks. The data from these checks is now being analysed more carefully to ensure that the reasons for these differences in achievement are identified and actions taken swiftly.

Academy leaders have extensive and rigorous procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching and students' progress. There are formal reviews six times each year, supported by more frequent checks where there are any concerns. Students' progress is checked against challenging targets. Teaching is evaluated through the progress that students make. The very well-coordinated monitoring by senior leaders, heads of faculty and heads of house works well to identify students, and teachers, who need support. Increasingly, heads of faculty undertake checks of students' work at meetings of all subject teachers to ensure that any lessons learned are fully understood by all.

Governors undertake independent analysis of, for example, the academy's data on students' progress and achievement. This enables them to hold senior and curriculum leaders to account well. They rigorously challenge heads of faculty to ensure that any improvements required are planned thoroughly and executed effectively. The series of 'raising attainment plans' meetings governors hold with heads of faculty are highly effective in enabling governors to provide the necessary support and challenge to these curriculum leaders.

When teachers are able and willing to improve, they receive well-targeted support and their teaching improves. When they are not, the academy swiftly uses formal procedures. As a result, teaching overall has improved. Despite this, there is still a small amount of inconsistency in the quality of teaching. Senior and curriculum leaders need to be fully confident that the monitoring procedures ensure that all teachers:

- set and maintain high expectations for students' work, attitudes and behaviour
- mark students' work regularly, provide students with clear feedback so that they know what to do to improve their work and make sure the students do what is expected of them
- use the information they gather from their on-going checks on students' progress, together with the data from the formal review points, to make sure that their planning and teaching leads to all students making at least good progress.

The academy's 'junior leadership team' has an extremely insightful and perceptive view of what good teaching looks like. Their evaluation of the current quality of teaching and students' behaviour in the academy is accurate. This group is not yet used well enough to support further improvements in teaching in the academy.

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 makes good use of a 'school improvement partner' to provide an external check on progress and advice when necessary, including making links with

other schools. Academy leaders attend events organised for and by the local authority, as well as those organised by Ofsted in the south west region. The academy also works in close collaboration with primary schools in the area to ensure smooth transition, and with the special school on the same site. It liaises with Gloucester College to provide suitable provision for a small number of students.

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

Yours sincerely

James Sage
Her Majesty's Inspector