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28 April 2015

Mr Stephen Nunn
Headteacher
Hamilton Academy
Priory Avenue
High Wycombe
HP13 6SG

Dear Mr Nunn

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hamilton Academy

Following my visit to your school on 28 April 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 second 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.

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 met with you and the deputy headteacher. I met with the Chair of the Governing Body the previous day. I met a representative of the local authority. You led me on a tour of both parts of the academy and showed me the architect's plans for the re-furbishment of the Priory Road and Hampden Road sites. I observed the pupils playing at lunchtime and spoke with a few informally. I examined a range of the academy's documents including your reports to governors, notes of visits from local authority advisors, the academy's action plan and information about pupils' achievement.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit the headteacher has left the academy. An interim headteacher managed the academy in the Autumn Term 2014 and was appointed to the headship with effect from 1 January 2015. The leadership team has been strengthened by the promotion of three members of staff, one as deputy headteacher. Many staff left at the end of June 2013 and since then thirty-five members of staff have joined the academy.

Main findings

In September 2014, a new leadership team took over the academy. You took on the interim headship and immediately conducted a necessary review. You made key appointments to the leadership team to strengthen it. You rightly sought support from the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust as there was much to be done. With them, you identified the most urgent matters requiring improvement. Immediately you created a purposeful action plan and began to address the issues. This focused work has resulted in an academy that is rapidly improving.

Also in September 2014 a large number of teachers joined the school so that the staff is very different from the time of the inspection. You are moulding them into an effective team by setting clear expectations, providing suitable training and checking their work regularly. You have an accurate and clear understanding of the quality of teaching currently.

Governors have provided good support for the improvements you are making. They hold you to account for all the academy's work. They contribute experience from their own professional lives which has been helpful, for example, in the planned major building works. They have kept control of the academy's finances which means that the budget is healthy. They are, however, allowing you to spend wisely on those things that are urgently needed to improve the academy.

Middle leaders are all relatively new in post so evidence of their effectiveness is not readily available. It is clearer in the year leaders and phase leaders who support their team members well. Subject leadership is an agreed priority for the next stage of the academy's development, as is the leadership of the curriculum.

Behaviour has improved steadily. The rate and length of exclusions have dropped. Learning is far less frequently disrupted. The conduct of the vast majority of pupils in lessons is good and has been described as such by all visitors to the academy. A few pupils continue to present challenges with their behaviour. For the most part, they are extremely well-managed. You have formed effective relationships with external partners who are able to provide good quality alternative placements for the tiny group who need even more help with their behaviour. Attendance is improving slowly. You have now got really helpful information which shows patterns and trends in attendance for particular pupils. Careful analysis shows these few pupils'

persistent absence negatively affects the school's attendance figures. Senior leaders have used a full range of strategies to improve attendance and are working towards issuing fixed penalty notices.

Teaching is improving quickly. You are clear that good training and coaching is enabling all the current staff to improve their practice together. Teachers use a variety of techniques and methods effectively, especially in the teaching of mathematics. In a year 6 lesson, the teacher was challenging effectively more able pupils to use the correct mathematical terminology to describe a collection of geometric shapes.

All teachers use a standard planning form which helps ensure consistent levels of performance. Teachers in year groups plan learning together so that they benefit from sharing ideas and resources. They are increasingly adopting the better practice that exists in the academy. The work done to improve teaching is an increasingly strong feature of the academy's work. You have invested heavily in a good stock of books and a reading scheme. The impact of this is seen in enhanced results in reading across Key Stage 2. You have also invested in better technology to support teachers' work. A majority of teachers were using ICT well. This contributed to good levels of engagement from the pupils.

Where teaching was judged to be less effective, you acted decisively to reduce the impact on pupils' learning. As a result you have, in a short period of time, removed a legacy of weak performance. You also support positively those teachers who need further help with their work. Both you and the deputy headteacher provide effective models or through direct support in lessons. You also rightly changed the arrangements for leadership of inclusion and the academy's work with disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. These two groups are further behind their peers than they should be but recent action has meant that they are catching up. Now that the provision for them is better organised and better managed, their achievement is beginning to accelerate. You presented information about these groups' achievements alongside their peers. This is helpful but shows the gaps clearly. Further focused work is essential to narrow these gaps even more.

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

External support

Local authority officers have given much needed support for the improvements that are underway. Consultants have worked with the academy on literacy development, and supporting pupils eligible for pupil premium funding. Local authority officers have also challenged you about pupils' achievement, holding you to account for the progress of pupils in each class. They have also provided regular opportunities for you to discuss the actions you are taking and the effectiveness of such work.

Partners in a local school have provided expertise on teaching and learning, especially where they have outstanding practice to share with your teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector