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Rebecca Elcocks
Principal
Four Dwellings Academy
Dwellings Lane
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Dear Ms Elcocks

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Four Dwellings Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 8 May 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.

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 the existing raising attainment plan so that it extends beyond the current academic year and includes measurable success criteria and intermediate milestones, that will help leaders and governors to better evaluate the success of actions being undertaken
- continue to develop the capacity of the governing body so that all governors are able to offer high-quality challenge and support to the academy's leaders
- continue to improve teaching through focused professional development for staff and rigorous monitoring by leaders so that standards of achievement continue to rise rapidly.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and your deputy principal, other middle leaders, a group of Year 9 students, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Regional Director of the Academies Enterprise Trust, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I reviewed the academy's raising attainment plan and self evaluation document, monitoring records of teaching, pupil-premium intervention records, behaviour logs and minutes of governing body meetings. I also joined an assistant principal for brief visits to eight lessons around the academy.

Context

Since January's section 5 inspection, there have been no significant changes in leadership or staffing at the academy. However, prior to this, in the 20 months since the academy came into being and since your appointment as principal, there had been a large turnover of teachers and senior leaders.

Main findings

The improvement at Four Dwellings under your leadership is evident and recognised by the sponsor, governors, staff and your students. You are very clear about what the academy needs to do in order to secure a good or better judgement at the next inspection. Indeed many of the areas for improvement identified in the January 2015 inspection report had already been identified in the academy's raising attainment plan and strategies to secure improvement were in place at the time of inspection. You are now seeing more impact from these actions with better teaching leading to improving achievement.

The brief post-inspection, raising attainment plan is a succinct and helpful addition to the main plan but both plans are limited to the current academic year. Although this conveys a clear sense of urgency, extending the plans would help the academy to have a clearer view of the longer-term improvements that it needs to secure. The plans do not include clear success criteria, even though these do exist elsewhere. The addition of success criteria and then intermediate milestones to the plan would help leaders and governors to better measure the success of the actions being taken.

You have worked quickly with senior leaders to address legacy issues of low expectations from staff and low aspirations among students, and have now successfully established an academy with a vision of high expectations for all its students. Staff share your vision and your students are now proud to belong to Four Dwellings.

Teaching is improving because of the focus on agreed features of good and outstanding teaching. Teachers are now more consistently pitching lessons at the right level for their students; they are providing better feedback to help students improve their work and lessons are more challenging. Robust and regular monitoring of teaching by senior and middle leaders is helping to consolidate these improvements, but there is still some way to go until they are thoroughly embedded across the academy.

Improving teaching is leading to improving achievement for all students including your disadvantaged students. The academy's predicted results indicate that the progress gap between disadvantaged students and others nationally will close considerably in 2015. The improving teaching in the academy is also seeing a reduction in low-level disruption and improved behaviour more generally. Students are very clear that behaviour is now much better than it was previously and that disruption of learning is rare.

Middle leaders now understand their responsibilities and accountability within their subject areas. They appreciate principal's clarity of vision and the consistent support and challenge that they receive from senior leaders and, as a result, they are now increasingly well equipped to hold teachers in their departments to account for students' progress.

Governors provide effective support and challenge to the academy's leaders. They have undergone a considerable amount of training that has led to a greater level of knowledge and an ability to ask the right questions of leaders. However, the challenge that they provide to leaders could be enhanced if raising attainment plans included clear success criteria. There is also further work to be done to ensure that expertise is spread further across the governing body to ensure that there is not over reliance on individuals and that there is succession planning in place.

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

External support

The academy is successfully identifying and accessing support from a wide range of partners. The Academies Enterprise Trust has provided support with the science curriculum and the development of GCSE English, and with training in mathematics. Local schools and academies have provided support for coaching in mathematics, moderation of assessment and using data to pitch lessons effectively. The academy's leaders know what help they need and are able to locate appropriate support and then evaluate its effectiveness.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector