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8 May 2015

Patrick Daley
Cordeaux Academy
North Holme Road
Louth
LN11 0HG

Dear Mr Daley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Cordeaux Academy

Following my visit to your school on 7 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 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 December 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the Academies Enterprise Trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the pace of improvements seen in mathematics, including in the teaching of mathematics, the quality of marking and students' achievement, is matched in science.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and other senior leaders, the head of mathematics, the mathematics adviser from the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) and other members of the mathematics department. I also met with three representatives of the governing body and the regional director for education for AET as well as two groups of students. I made short visits with you to 12 lessons to look at the quality of marking and feedback.

I scrutinised the academy's evaluation of its work, the academy improvement plan, a sample of minutes from meetings of the governing body and the findings of a review of provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs and those eligible for additional funding through the pupil premium.

Context

You took up your permanent post in January 2015. The previous Principal, who was appointed on a temporary basis, is currently seconded to another school. The head of mathematics returned to work full-time in January 2015 and resumed responsibility for the leadership and management of mathematics from the start of the summer term. Two permanent teaching appointments have been made in science, including the appointment of a deputy leader of science. As a result of a review of the sixth form curriculum, the academy will no longer offer AS or A level courses from September 2015, other than for those who are part way through these courses.

Main findings

Since taking up post, you have quickly established an effective working relationship with the senior leadership team, as well as governors and representatives from the academy's trust. Those who work with you appreciate your honesty, openness and consultative approach as well as your clear vision for bringing about the improvements needed. As a result, the senior leadership team is cohesive and effective.

You and your team are bringing about important improvements, underpinned by a rigorous and accurate approach to self evaluation. One clear example of this is the academy's development plan which has been strengthened to ensure that the actions being taken to improve the academy are making enough difference to students' achievement. Another example is the way in which the academy's judgements about the quality of teaching have changed. Assessments of teaching are now much more robust than before, and made with clear reference to data regarding students' achievement as well as scrutiny of students' work over time. In addition, all lesson observations are moderated to ensure consistency among senior and middle leaders, and judgements are changed if ever the evidence provided is not judged to be sufficiently robust. These changes mean that academy leaders now have a much more accurate view of the quality of teaching than before.

Training for teachers is now focused precisely on teachers' individual development needs. A range of programmes is in place to increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and to bring about improvements where teaching is weaker. As a result of the section 5 inspection, staff have received additional training in how best to meet the needs of different groups of learners in lessons. The academy's monitoring, drawing on the Teachers' Standards, shows a marked improvement in this aspect of teaching this term.

Marking has also improved, particularly in mathematics, where teachers' precise and helpful written feedback is having a clear impact in raising students' attainment. Teachers are routinely setting additional work as part of their written feedback. Students have got into the habit of completing these additional tasks, not least they say, because they know the extra task is focused precisely on their particular needs. The new mathematics curriculum, introduced in Years 7 and 8 since January, is having a good impact in deepening students' conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills.

These improvements in the teaching of mathematics have been made possible because staffing is now stable. Students I met with during the inspection were critical of some of the mathematics teaching they had received during the autumn term but agreed, unanimously, that teaching is now much improved. Students preparing for their GCSE mathematics examinations this summer reported that they were confident they would do well because of the good teaching they have received this term and the very regular practice they have been given at tackling examination questions.

Marking in other curriculum areas, though improving is still not consistent. For example, the marking seen in science books varied in quality, detail and effectiveness as did the presentation of students' work. Students told me that marking has improved across the academy but said it is still not equally good in all subjects.

Following last year's disappointing GCSE results, systems to monitor students' progress have been strengthened, including through external moderation of students' work. Teachers and middle leaders are held to account more thoroughly than before for ensuring that all groups of students make at least the progress expected, including students eligible for the pupil premium, disabled students and those who have special educational needs. The academy's latest data show significant improvements in students' achievement in mathematics with higher proportions of students currently in Year 11 on track to meet their targets than before. You and your staff have rightly identified as a priority the need to accelerate the progress of the most able students in and beyond mathematics.

Progress in science is also improving but causes some concern. As in mathematics, the science department is now fully staffed following a period of turbulence. However, improvements are more fragile and the academy's data show that while students currently in Year 10 are doing well, achievement in Year 11 remains too low. Improvements in science have not kept pace with those made in mathematics. Achievement in geography and resistant materials is also too low in Year 11. The academy has made good use of the review of pupil premium funding, commissioned and completed just before the last inspection.

This has helped refine this area of the academy's work with the result that gaps in achievement between disadvantaged students and others in the academy are narrowing and, in the lower years, are very minimal. Previously weaknesses in teaching and in monitoring the effectiveness of strategies to raise the attainment of disadvantaged students, mean that gaps remain for current Year 11 students.

Governors are having a much better impact on the academy's effectiveness than before. They have sharpened their skills in holding senior staff to account and grown in confidence as a result of the additional training they have undertaken. Governors have been trained to examine the achievement data presented by the school more forensically than they did before; minutes from meetings of the governing body show good levels of challenge and questioning.

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

The academy benefits from good support from the Academies Enterprise Trust. This has included regular visits to check on progress by the Trust's Regional Director of Education who also chairs the governing body. The trust has provided particularly strong support in mathematics regarding the design and implementation of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum. Good links are in place to support other aspects of the academy's work, for example in literacy and the provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- cc. Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- cc. Local authority
- cc. The academy chain where relevant
- cc. The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form hns.efa@education.gsi.gov.uk
- cc. [For academies only] [CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk]