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23 June 2015

Anthony Partington
Stamford Welland Academy
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Dear Mr Partington

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Stamford Welland Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 22 June 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. At its previous section 5 inspection, the academy 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 Principal, other senior leaders, students, representatives of the Governing Body and Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The academy's development plan and self evaluation document were evaluated. I also met with a group of middle leaders and mathematics and science teachers. I made short visits to nine lessons.

Context

Since the inspection, the academy has recruited additional staff who will take up their posts in September. This includes an additional Assistant Principal and two teachers appointed to teach at the academy and at two local primary schools.

Main findings

Your highly effective leadership is bringing about rapid improvements to the academy. With good support from governors and trustees, you and other senior leaders have secured significant improvements to the quality of teaching and students' achievement. These improvements are underpinned by the academy's strong development plan, which sets out clearly what the academy needs to do to improve, how it will do it and how success will be measured. The plan incorporates and builds on the findings from the previous section 5 inspection and ensures that all staff responsible for securing the necessary changes are held fully to account.

Strategies to improve the quality of middle leadership are proving to be effective. Strong systems to quality assure the work of middle leaders are in place and are accompanied by a well-planned programme of professional development. After the section 5 inspection, middle leaders worked together to identify the key leadership and management skills needed to fulfil their roles effectively. They then assessed their own skills against this criteria. This information was used to devise a training programme in which those with particular expertise would support colleagues to develop practice across the academy. Middle leaders value the opportunity to work together. They also welcome the increased support and challenge provided by senior staff.

The academy's self-evaluation is robust and accurate. This is because it is underpinned by a comprehensive and searching schedule of monitoring. Middle leaders meet weekly with their line managers to discuss students' progress and good planning ensures that these discussions focus on how well different groups of students are doing, including the most able and those eligible for the pupil premium. Analysis of data by house leaders ensures that any students who are falling behind are quickly identified so that support can be put in place. Monitoring is further enhanced by checking pupils' books on a weekly basis and interviewing different groups of students in order to ensure that the actions taken are making a difference in all areas of the academy's work and for all classes.

Working with staff across the academy, senior leaders have established high expectations with regard to the quality of teaching. Drawing on the Teachers' Standards, the 'Stamford Welland Way', sets out how, precisely, teaching will meet the academy's pledge to provide 'excellence in teaching and learning'. Staff share this vision for excellence, not least because they were involved in devising it.

The academy's own monitoring data indicates that the quality of teaching is improving and that more teaching is consistently good than at the time of the section 5 inspection. Teachers' use of assessment has improved markedly, particularly in mathematics. In the three mathematics lessons I visited, strong use of assessment underpinned very effective learning. In two of the lessons, pupils were highly motivated by the personalised reports they received which diagnosed their individual strengths and weaknesses following a recent test. This enabled them to

identify where they needed more practice and the teachers used the information well to inform their teaching. Hence, in one lesson, the teacher went over questions on straight line graphs because the assessment data indicated that this was an area of common misunderstanding. In another mathematics lessons, on Pythagoras, students were able to choose which question to do based on their current level of understanding. Most had the knowledge, understanding and maturity to pick the most challenging task.

In discussions, students across a range of year groups commented on the frequency, timeliness and quality of marking in mathematics. They also reported how marking has improved across the academy and that the best practice in marking is seen far more widely than before. Teachers' marking now identifies precisely what student's need to do to improve and students are routinely set additional tasks which most of them complete. This is proving effective in improving the quality of students' work, their understanding and their confidence.

Teaching is also improving in science. In the more effective lessons, good use of assessment again underpins students' good achievement. For example, in a Year 10 physics lesson, pupils assessed their subject-specific strengths and weaknesses before selecting either a 'practice' or a 'challenge' question. In a chemistry lesson, students made good progress because the learning took place at a good pace and students knew they would be held to account for the quality of their work and verbal feedback. Progress was more variable in the BTEC lessons seen. This is because not all teachers had sufficiently high expectations with regards to students' behaviour and work-rate.

These improvements to teaching and the use of data to closely monitor students' achievement are resulting in rising attainment. For example, in mathematics, far higher proportions of students are making the progress expected than before. Academy data suggest that attainment in almost all subjects is likely to be higher in this summer's GCSE examinations than last year. Academy leaders are confident that their projections are accurate because they are based on regular tests which are rigorously moderated. The introduction of the BTEC in science is increasing the proportion of students attaining a good qualification in science though the proportion on track to secure two good qualifications in science remains similar to last year.

Since the inspection, governors have revised their committee structure to ensure sufficient focus is given to improving the quality of teaching and raising students' achievement. With good leadership from the experienced chair, a National Leader of Governance and former headteacher, the governing body is well placed to continue to provide the necessary support and challenge to the academy.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. You agreed to send me the results from this summer's public examinations together with an analysis of students' achievement in these examinations by 11 September 2015.

External support

Academy leaders receive good support from the Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust. The Principal meets regularly with the Trust's Executive Principal to discuss the academy's progress and other senior leaders benefit from opportunities to work with senior leaders across the Trust. Support from the Trust in human resources and managing the budget have enabled academy leaders to focus their attention on improving teaching and raising achievement. The Trust's Academy Improvement Adviser works regularly and effectively with staff across the academy to improve their teaching and leadership skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- For academies - CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk