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Mr Steve Gordon
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Dear Mr Gordon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Huxlow Science College

Following my visit to your academy on 25 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2014. 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 in order to become a good school.

The academy should take further action to:

- ensure that new leaders in humanities are supported and challenged well to enable them to carry out their work effectively so that pupils' progress in geography and history is accelerated across all key stages
- make clearer how work to improve the quality of teaching will be evaluated; who will evaluate the work and by when.

Evidence

During the inspection meetings were held with you, other senior leaders and the Chair of the Governing Body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I scrutinised academy documents in relation to pupils' performance, and academy improvement planning. I visited some lessons in mathematics, history and English with a deputy headteacher. During the observations I spoke with pupils informally and scrutinised their workbooks.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit there have been a number of staffing changes. Nearly all the members of the mathematics department have left the academy. New heads of the mathematics and humanities departments have been appointed. A subject leader for geography has also been appointed. Two deputy headteachers have joined the academy, after their predecessors left the academy to take up posts in other schools.

Main findings

You have continued to drive improvements across the academy. You are supported well by your senior team, who are experienced and effective. The leadership team communicate clear messages about the academy expectations. Teachers adopt and practise academy policies with increasing consistency. For example, most teachers now give meaningful feedback to pupils in their workbooks, which helps them to make progress. In addition, most teachers use the academy behaviour management systems fairly and consistently. As a result, behaviour in lessons is mostly characterised by high levels of engagement and cooperation. Teachers are supported well to improve their practice. Opportunities to learn from good and outstanding teaching in other schools are a regular feature of training programmes across the academy.

You have quickly tackled the key issues which led to the disappointing examination results in 2015. As a result, the English department is reviewing their controlled assessments with the support of specialist leaders in education and other consultants. Pupils' current progress and attainment in English at Key Stage 4 is close to the national average. In the sixth form, leaders are now improving the systems to ensure consistent, high-quality teaching across subjects in the consortium. Nearly all pupils are on track to achieve their targets. New subject leaders in humanities are committed to making the improvements needed but are inexperienced. You and your senior team recognise that urgent action must be taken to strengthen leadership in humanities. Furthermore, you also understand that it is only when leadership is effective and secure in this faculty that pupils' progress in history and geography will be accelerated and the legacy of underachievement will be reversed.

You and your senior leadership team have introduced a wide range of systems to quality assure the quality of teaching across the academy. Subject leaders are increasingly held to account and becoming confident in carrying out their monitoring duties. Currently, it is not always clear when, how or by whom the activities to assure the quality of teaching will be evaluated. You agree that by sharpening up the quality assurance systems, you will gain a better understanding of how effective the academy's work has been to improve teaching and pupils' progress across the academy.

Governors have improved the way they support and challenge the academy. They now visit the academy regularly to see for themselves the work of teachers and senior leaders.

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 continues to draw on the effective support of the Pilgrim Learning Trust, a network of 27 schools. Good and outstanding schools in the network have helped the academy to validate its teachers' assessments of pupils' work. National leaders of education are in place to support the English and humanities departments in light of the disappointing examination results in 2015. External consultants have also been commissioned to support the academy's pupil performance data systems and examination board requirements. The academy has also aligned itself to successful teaching schools in the region. Their support has been both helpful and effective.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, DfE Academies Advisers Unit, the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Zarina Connolly

Her Majesty's Inspector