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Mr Gary Pratt
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Dear Mr Pratt

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Chafford Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 16 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 first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement, identified at the last section 5 inspection, in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, one of the deputy headteachers and one of the assistant headteachers, and with the Chair of the Governing Body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The academy action plans were evaluated. I made short visits to ten lessons, including in science and English. I was accompanied on these by you and two other senior leaders. We paid particular attention to the quality of assessment, literacy and standards of pupils' work.

Context

Since the inspection, there have been ten new appointments to the teaching staff, including four heads of department and one faculty director. The science department is now fully staffed.

Main findings

I am grateful for the honesty and straightforwardness of our discussions throughout the day. The 2015 examination results were disappointing, particularly in the proportions gaining five good GCSE passes, including in English and mathematics. You told me about remaining difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. You also said that there are still significant inconsistencies in the quality of teaching that contribute to these disappointing outcomes.

The observations that we shared during my visit reflect these inconsistencies. In particular, we noted a lack of stretch for the most-able pupils, particularly in science and in aspects of literacy. For example, some of the reading books selected by Year 10 pupils were too easy and did not present them with sufficient challenge. We saw written work and worksheets in science books that did not sufficiently extend pupils' writing and deeper exploration of scientific concepts. We saw too few examples of pupils' speaking skills being developed or exploited. A notable exception was in history, where lively and enthusiastic teaching in an exceptionally stimulating classroom was reflected by animated debate and contributions from pupils.

By and large, the behaviour seen in classrooms was positive, with pupils showing compliance with the academy's expectations. They seemed willing to accept instruction and willing to learn. However, at times when teaching was not engaging, it was noticeable that pupils' interest waned. While some teachers and pupils have clearly made efforts to promote and show good standards of presentation in their books, this is not consistent. The quality of feedback also remains inconsistent. Although systems are in place to collect and process assessment information, the quality of feedback that we saw was disappointing, particularly in science. An exception was in German, where oral feedback and questioning in the target language was precise and quick-fire.

The academy has an extensive post-Ofsted action plan to address the areas for improvement. While all areas for improvement are identified, timelines and targets are not sharp enough; if they were, they would enable the school to monitor progress more precisely than at present. Similar plans are in place for curriculum subject areas, but you were not able to show me an action plan for science. This is surprising, given that science was a key area for improvement at the Section 5 inspection.

As reported at the inspection in June, the governing body has provided challenge about the academy's work. Minutes of governing body meetings record increased levels of questioning and the governing body is aware that the academy needs to make significant improvements. Discussions are now taking place with a view to the academy becoming part of a multi-academy trust, rather than continuing as a stand-alone academy. It is my view that any discussions should be concluded quickly. This is because of the limited progress made since the last inspection and the issues that you acknowledge the academy faces. At present, the uncertainty does not appear to be helping the academy.

External support

The academy has continued to engage an independent consultancy to undertake individual reviews of departments. Any impact that these reviews might have appears inconsistent because the system for coaching and mentoring middle leaders and individual teachers is only in its infancy. Furthermore, only limited work has been done to broker good practice work with other schools and academies, which was another key area for improvement.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection. This includes meeting with the full governing body to discuss my findings in more detail.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector