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Simon Turney
Principal
Tamworth Enterprise College and AET Academy
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Dear Mr Turney

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Tamworth Enterprise College and AET Academy

Following my visit to your school on 14 September 2017, 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 May 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in May 2016, the school 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 in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that newer middle leaders are trained and supported to ensure consistency of practice and raising of standards in their areas
- sharpen the school's improvement plan to make clear what specific actions are to take place, when they will take place and who is accountable for their success
- ensure that revised governance arrangements quickly become at least as effective as those currently in place.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior and middle leaders. Telephone conversations were held with the chair of the governing board and a representative of the school's sponsor, the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET). Brief visits were made to several lessons with senior members of staff. The school improvement plan was evaluated, as were several other documents, including a review of the school's use of pupil-premium funding.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the school has contracted in size and several staff have left as a result. Two assistant headteachers have left the senior leadership team and have not been replaced. The English, mathematics and science departments have new leaders. The history, geography and religious education departments have been combined into a single faculty, under new leadership. Three 'schools of learning' have been created, each containing several subject departments. The school's pastoral system has been reorganised so that tutor groups are now made up of pupils from a single year group.

Main findings

Leaders and governors have taken a range of appropriate steps to address the weaknesses in teaching, outcomes and leadership identified at the previous inspection. Improvement is evident in each of these areas, although its pace has been more rapid in some than others. Leaders are clear about the school's remaining weaknesses and what needs to be done to bring about more rapid progress. Their improvement plan helpfully and straightforwardly spells out the areas in need of improvement alongside clear descriptions of what success will look like. It also includes the actions planned to secure improvement, but these lack detail and timescales. The plan would be strengthened by identifying individuals who will be responsible for the success of specific strategies.

Teaching has improved since the previous inspection. There is now a greater degree of consistency across the school in teachers' planning and use of the information they have about pupils, including their ability. Behaviour has improved further and pupils are typically well behaved, attentive and keen to do well. Classrooms are calm and purposeful.

Science was identified as a key area in need of improvement at the previous inspection. Leaders have revised the science curriculum so that it better meets pupils' needs, especially the least able. New leadership, in place now for 12 months, is seeing teaching and pupils' progress beginning to improve. The school's assessment information suggests that some modest improvement is evident in the GCSE results of 2017, but greater improvement is evident in current pupils' progress.

History and geography remain the weakest subjects in GCSE examinations. Leaders have very recently created a single humanities faculty that includes the history and geography departments alongside religious education, a subject where outcomes have been strong in recent years. Leaders have also included the humanities faculty within a new communications 'school of learning' alongside the English department. The intention is to share the strong practice that exists in English with humanities. It is too early to be able to judge the impact of these structural and leadership changes. However, visits to history and geography lessons confirmed a positive climate for learning, strong relationships and an increasing focus on effective assessment.

The recommended review of the school's use of pupil-premium funding took place in February 2017. Leaders and teachers have implemented its recommendations effectively. There is now a greater focus on high-quality teaching as well as providing additional support for disadvantaged pupils when necessary. Additionally, leaders have made increasing use of the Outward Bound Trust to provide opportunities for disadvantaged and other pupils. Evidence of an improving picture in this area is emerging. The school's analysis of GCSE outcomes in 2017 suggests that, although there remains a difference between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally, this difference is diminishing. The school's internal assessment information indicates that the difference is diminishing more quickly for current pupils.

Governance has been strengthened since the previous inspection. The governing board now contains greater expertise, especially in education. Governors understand the school's strengths and weaknesses and are providing greater challenge to school leaders as a result. Governance arrangements are soon to be revised because of AET's decision to reform governance in all of its schools nationally. The school is set to share a governing board with The Rawlett School, a local AET academy, but the precise composition of the new governing board has yet to be determined. Although this currently provides a degree of uncertainty for leaders and governors, there is no evidence that it is hindering the school's improvement.

External support

The great majority of support for the school has been provided by the AET. The AET regional adviser has supported senior and middle leaders in their monitoring and evaluation activities, leading to greater consistency and rigour in these processes. Significant help for the mathematics department has supported new leadership, curriculum development and improved teaching. AET support for science is at an earlier stage, but has already helped the school to improve its science scheme of learning. Support has been less forthcoming in history and geography, where leaders are developing links with local schools. Here, it is too soon to see an impact.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing board, the regional schools' commissioner and the director of children's services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector