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Ian Barton
Principal
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Dear Mr Barton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Dukeries Academy.

Following my visit to your school on 12 January 2016, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the Academy Transformation Trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and the senior leadership team. I spoke with the Chair of the Governing Body and the Improvement Director for the Academy Transformation Trust. We conducted a learning walk of the school and observed parts of a range of lessons. While in lessons I spoke with pupils and looked at their work in books. I spoke formally with a group of pupils, including sixth form learners. I discussed with senior leaders the 2015 GCSE results, the performance of pupils currently in the academy and the school self-evaluation.

Context

Since the first monitoring visit conducted in March 2015, you have restructured the senior leadership team and new appointments have been made. You have recruited a new head of English and of design and technology. Six members of staff joined the academy in September 2015. You have introduced the 'house system' for pupils and revised the behaviour policy and rewards system.

Main findings

There have been significant issues to address regarding the inaccurate moderation of 2015 GCSE English coursework. A coursework re-moderation resulted in an 11 percentage point increase in those pupils who achieved 5 A* to C grades, including English and mathematics. Because of the delay in gaining an accurate view of performance in English, the published information about GCSE results in 2015 is not as accurate as it could be; this includes the information within Raiseonline. You have managed this challenging situation well, but recognise that it has taken its toll.

Pupils behave well within this academy, they look smart and are well mannered, they welcome the opportunity to speak about their work and the progress they are making. At breaktime pupils are cooperative, queue sensibly and appear to enjoy each other's company. We discussed the need for further social areas to provide an alternative to the outdoors in poor weather. You have been successful in changing the culture of the academy so that pupils want to behave well and want to achieve.

The 'success centre' is a success! You are determined to ensure that all pupils stay in school to learn. Currently, there have been no permanent exclusions and fixed term exclusions have reduced dramatically. You recognise the need to ensure that pupils are successfully integrated back to their lessons and that they then make the progress that they should. We discussed the need to carefully track the progress of these pupils and also to more carefully evaluate the impact of this provision on the progress made of groups of pupils, particularly those who are eligible for free school meals.

Leadership capacity has improved; you have attracted talented new senior and middle leaders to the academy and now feel able to drive further improvement at the rapid pace that is required. The challenge now is to ensure that leaders at all levels are systematically held to account and that they receive the professional development and training that they require. The Academy Transformation Trust has a role in providing further leadership support, and this includes further mentoring for you. As a headteacher within his second year of headship it is important that you continue to receive effective guidance, challenge and support.

In 2015, the GCSE performance of some subjects was not as predicted, and this was particularly the case in science, design and technology and geography. You are clear that the data and assessment systems are now more robust. Moderation, including external moderation, is now systematic and line management is increasingly tenacious. Fortnightly standards meeting take place and this means that teachers are held to account more regularly. The Governing Body and the Academy Transformation Trust have a role in holding leaders to account to make sure that accurate assessment processes are now in place.

There is still some work to do to raise the expectations of what pupils can achieve. Confusion does remain at pupil level as to what their targets mean. Some of the targets that pupils select are insufficiently challenging. We discussed this issue at length. You need to ensure that pupils understand more clearly what they are aiming for and build more carefully pupils' expectations of what they are able to achieve.

In the pupils' books that we scrutinised together, there was too much acceptance of careless or incomplete work. Pupils' experience of what is an acceptable standard of work is inconsistent. Pupils require clarity about how to present their work and what is the acceptable standard.

An extensive GCSE intervention programme is in place and is well attended. Some Year 11 pupils spoke enthusiastically about the design and technology 'Saturday session' they attended; some attended even though they had completed their work, in order to 'help out'. Pupils said that they felt like there was now a 'combined effort between teachers and pupils' to make sure that they 'do good'. 'Team Challenge' and 'Go Green' are further examples of programmes you have introduced to make sure that pupils 'speak the language of progress'. Sixth form learners would benefit from the introduction of similar strategies to support their learning and challenge their perception of what they are capable of.

On our learning walk, we observed tutor period. During this time, some pupils are taught personal, health and social education. In order to prepare students more effectively for learning in modern Britain, all pupils require a more effective experience of personal, health and social education than that observed. Pupils are thirsty to learn about the world outside of their community and deserve to have this thirst quenched. They, including the sixth form, also require carefully planned, thoughtful and meaningful learning activities to promote their personal and social well-being.

The academy receives effective support from the governing body. The Chair and vice-chair of governors have an education background and are able to appropriately challenge leaders. They know the academy well.

External support

The Academy Transformation Trust is providing effective support to the academy. I discussed with the Academy Improvement Director the importance of ensuring that leadership support continues. This is because many new leaders have joined the academy and they need to be able to 'hit the ground running'.

You are a talented Principal and have been in role for two years. It is important that you continue to receive effective mentoring and that you broaden your network of other headteachers and Principals within and outside of the trust.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Nottinghamshire, The Education Funding Agency and the Chief Executive Officer for the Academy Transformation Trust.

Yours sincerely

Jayne Ashman
Her Majesty's Inspector