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14 November 2013

Mr Neal McGowan
Headteacher
William de Ferrers School
Trinity Square
South Woodham Ferrers
Essex
CM3 5JU

Dear Mr McGowan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to William de Ferrers Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 14 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2013. 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. The academy should take further action to:

- thoroughly evaluate at regular intervals the effectiveness of every subject leader in leading improvements, particularly to improving the quality of teaching in their departments and to accelerating the progress made by all students.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and your team of senior leaders, six members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The academy action plan was evaluated. A learning walk around the academy with senior leaders gave me the opportunity to observe students' learning during lessons.

Context

Since the last inspection five newly qualified teachers have joined the academy. Two subject leaders and a deputy headteacher have left the academy. Two internal appointments have been made to the senior leadership team to build further capacity to lead improvements. A new teacher has been appointed to lead English.

Main findings

The percentage of students attaining five or more C grades including English and mathematics increased slightly in 2013 compared with the previous year but the proportions of students making or exceeding expected progress in English and mathematics remained below the academy's own targets. You have reaffirmed with staff the need for immediate and sustained improvement in their teaching, and for all of them to raise their expectations of what students are capable of achieving.

Senior leaders have received training to enable them to systematically monitor the quality of teaching and an extensive programme of lesson monitoring is in place. There is an agreed understanding amongst staff that observations and additional training will continue in those areas where teaching is regularly less than good.

Some improvements to the quality of teaching have already been made. For example, students' books show that most teachers are regularly marking their work and providing them with clear advice to improve. Less progress has been made in letting students know their target grades and what they need to do to achieve them, providing them with opportunities to learn independently and in groups, and in ensuring that work provided for them in lessons is suitably challenging.

Detailed plans for raising achievement in all subjects are in place. Senior leaders have direct responsibility for supporting subject leaders and for checking that improvements are being made. Recent departmental reviews carried out jointly by senior leaders and the local authority show that not all subject leaders are taking full responsibility for leading improvements in their subjects, particularly for improving teaching and holding their colleagues to account for the progress made by all students.

The Governing Body is equally committed to securing rapid improvements to the academy. They recognise the need to prioritise tackling known weaknesses in teaching and in subject leadership if the academy is to become a good one. Additional training has empowered them to support you in your drive for improvement, and to challenge senior leaders on the progress they are making in raising achievement.

PROTECT-INSPECTION



Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Support and training for staff and governors provided by the local authority in managing data and evaluating the effectiveness of provision in core subjects is valued by school leaders. This level of support and challenge will be maintained over the next year. The headteacher is working closely with the local authority to forge a new partnership with a local school facing similar circumstances in order to share effective practice and raise achievement in English.

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

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector