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Anne Franklin
Interim Principal
Alec Reed Academy
Bengarth Road
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Dear Ms Franklin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Alec Reed Academy

Following my visit to your school on 27 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 April 2013. This visit focused specifically on the leadership and management of the academy. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the sponsor are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- improve the quality of students' writing by developing their speaking skills and use of formal language
- ensure the quality and consistency of lesson observations by placing more focus on the impact of different teaching strategies on the learning and progress of individuals and groups of pupils
- make better use of the good practice that exists in the primary and secondary phases to improve teaching across the academy.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, other leaders and teachers, the academy sponsor and a governor to discuss the actions being taken to improve the academy. I also held a telephone conversation with the incoming Principal. I evaluated your revised

self-evaluation and action plan and reviewed other relevant documentation. I joined you and other leaders in visiting lessons.

Context

Since my last visit there have been extensive staff changes. The Interim Principal and Interim Vice Principal, in post at the time of the April 2013 inspection, left at the end of the summer term. The Associate Principal became Interim Principal and a substantive Vice Principal was appointed as Interim Senior Vice Principal. Two new Assistant Principals with responsibility for English and mathematics are now in post, replacing temporary leadership of these subjects. Six middle leaders are now members of the extended senior secondary leadership team with whole-school responsibilities. The deputy head primary phase is now the substantive primary phase headteacher supported by the phase leaders. A new leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage took up post in September 2013. Since my last visit 22 teachers, including six long-term supply staff, have left the academy and 23 have joined, including one very recent temporary appointment to provide additional English teaching. While some are new to the profession others have more experience and include an advanced skills teacher in mathematics who, has also taken on whole-school responsibilities. The governing body has extended their membership. A previous parent governor has been co-opted, two new teacher governors and one new parent governor have been appointed. A substantive Principal and deputy head of primary phase have been appointed; both are due to take up their posts at the start of the summer term 2014.

Main findings

Following your appointments at the end of July 2013, you and the Interim Senior Vice Principal acted rapidly and incisively to address the very low 2013 GCSE results. As result, there is effective teamwork in both the primary and secondary phases. Staff at all levels are working collaboratively, with enthusiasm and determination, to raise the achievement of all students. You quickly realised that to drive change at a sufficient pace much better use of data, increased leadership capacity and external support was required. A new action plan focuses sharply on improving the quality of teaching and is based on in depth self-evaluation and shows your thorough understanding of the academy's position. The actions, while numerous, are clearly explained and prioritised well to provide a firm platform for raising students' achievement through high quality teaching, better behaviour management and improved leadership and management. While the approach to monitoring progress is clear there could be more clarity for interim checking of the impact of planned actions.

Middle leaders on the extended leadership team have embraced their roles and enabled senior leaders to keep focused on their key roles in securing improvement. For example, one of the newly promoted leaders has simplified the behaviour policy. It is now more consistently applied and incidents are recorded and acted on. Careful

analysis of behaviour information is leading to additional support for teachers and students where needed. As a result, behaviour has improved and the academy is now a much calmer place with a more purposeful and business-like atmosphere. Students' attitudes to learning are better, the pace of learning has increased and they are clearer about their current and future targets and what they need to do achieve them.

Leaders have now ensured that school assessment information is accurate and is effectively used to track students' progress. The new senior leaders in secondary English and mathematics are acting with speed to identify the strengths and areas for development within their subjects and have wasted no time in acting on their improvement plans. In English, for instance, teachers now have a better understanding of GCSE marking requirements.

The new primary headteacher is driving change and securing improvement rapidly. She is making effective use of the expertise within the primary team and from external sources. Despite the many changes within the teaching team, consistency of practice is already evident. Primary classrooms are now vibrant learning environments. Marking has improved. Although there is still some variation in quality, all teachers are using the same approach. Students like the new assessment grids which are helping to raise their aspirations and ensure they are clear about their next steps. Teachers and class workers jointly attend the weekly training sessions. These sessions are informed by the outcomes of observations in lesson. Staff are adopting a collaborative approach to planning and are sharing best practice. This is helping everyone to improve their teaching, including those who are new to the profession. Improving literacy is high on the agenda, exemplified by the use of the writing 'toolkit' in every classroom. Assessment information and books show that students are making better progress.

Improvements in teaching are also evident in the secondary phase. This is a direct result of professional development, such as that to help teachers place greater emphasis on the quality of students' learning and progress in their lessons. Leaders are carefully monitoring targeted interventions, as in the primary phase, to ensure maximum impact. Nonetheless, they recognise there is much ground for students to make up, particularly those in Year 11. Students say that guidance on how to improve is now personalised and this is improving their confidence and their learning. The quality of marking is improving but, as in the primary phase, inconsistent practice remains. Secondary teachers are aware of the importance of improving students' literacy skills. However, some students' handwriting remains a potential barrier to their achievement. Teachers do not consistently develop students' speaking or writing skills.

Senior and middle leaders across both phases routinely undertake lesson observations, short visits to lessons and work scrutiny. This is recorded centrally to build a picture of typical teaching over time. While leaders recognise and make use of good practice within their respective phases they are not extending this across the

academy. Senior leaders are aware that much teaching still requires improvement and that a small amount is inadequate. A supportive approach is being effectively used to tackle this. Senior leaders recognise that they need to ensure quality and consistency in lesson observations, especially on making sure that the focus is on the impact of teaching on the learning and progress of students and student groups.

Governors are now allocated to a primary phase or secondary subject. They have begun to make a series of visits to gather first-hand evidence on the quality of teaching and leadership and their impact on students' achievement. They are using this information well. For instance, as a result of a visit to the English department, an additional teacher has been appointed to give the subject leader more time to drive improvement.

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

The academy has made extensive use of outside consultants and providers since my first visit. This is helping leaders to improve teaching and learning. This support has been far ranging, from helping to restructure the timetable, to bridging leadership gaps in English and mathematics, and providing regular support to academy leaders. The new Principal has made several visits to the academy and is working with the Interim Principal to support the transition.

In English, consultants have worked with teachers to ensure accurate assessments of students' work and have supported the new subject leader to improve teaching within the department. The primary phase is now receiving support from the Ealing School Effectiveness Service with specific focus on teaching in Years 1 and 3. The Service has also advised staff on the more effective use of assessment information. To help improve consistency in lesson observations, an external consultant is shortly to carry out joint observations with subject leaders.

Links with good and outstanding schools are beginning to help teachers and leaders make further improvements, for example in Key Stage 1, and in the teaching of geography in the secondary phase. The academy has joined a club with other schools to share best practice and training. This is helping the academy in driving up standards in Year 11.

I am copying this letter to the academy sponsor, Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Ealing and The Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Angela Corbett
Her Majesty's Inspector