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10 May 2014

Catharine Wensley
Acting Principal
Hackney University Technical College
Shoreditch Campus
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London
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Dear Ms Wensley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hackney University Technical College

Following my visit to your academy on 9 May 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 first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2014. 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.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I met with four members of the governing body and held a discussion with the academy's sponsors. The academy's improvement plan was evaluated. I held discussions with two subject leaders, three teachers, and eight students from Years 10 and 11. You joined me on some brief visits to lessons where we looked at teaching, learning, talked with students and scrutinised some of their work.

Context

You have been the Acting Principal since March 2014 following the Principal's departure. The governing body will advertise for a substantive Principal in September 2014. There have been three new appointments to the senior leadership team since the previous inspection. These include: an associate assistant vice-principal, an assistant vice-principal and an acting vice-principal. A temporary behaviour mentor was appointment in January 2014.

Main findings

You and the staff have responded positively to the challenges of improving the academy. Leaders and teachers now have a much clearer sense of direction. The academy's improvement plans are ambitious and well-focussed on the required improvements to teaching, behaviour and achievement. In some areas, plans could be sharpened so that all expected outcomes are more clearly quantified.

New appointments to the leadership team have made a significant contribution to better line management arrangements for subject leaders. Consequently, they are already being better challenged, supported and developed. Subject leaders say that they are developing a greater awareness of their roles as leaders and managers of achievement and teaching. For example, they are more regularly talking to teachers about the quality of their teaching.

Leaders have created better systems to manage student achievement data. Consequently, they are able to monitor students' progress in more detail and provide better information to teachers. Teachers commented on subject leaders' developing use of this information in discussions with them about students' progress. While a small number of teachers are beginning to make better use of this in their planning, we observed that this is not widespread.

You have begun to make changes to the grouping of students in English and mathematics. This is helping some teachers set work is of the right difficulty for students. However, during our visits to lessons, we saw this is not common practice, even in classes that are grouped by ability.

You have reviewed the behaviour policy and made it easier to understand for students and teachers. You have also very recently introduced a new rewards system. Both of these actions have already had impact. Teachers and students agree that there is greater consistency in managing behaviour and that behaviour has improved since the last inspection.

You have made good use of a behaviour and teaching consultant to help teachers improve how they manage behaviour in lessons. Teachers spoke about how their

teaching had benefitted from training, observation and coaching. Some teachers indicated they now had better skills and greater confidence to manage behaviour. While students are clear that the overall management of behaviour has improved, they also spoke about some teachers' over-reliance on behaviour mentors to manage some disruption to learning.

Fixed-term exclusions have increased, as a result of your robust stance on what is not acceptable behaviour by students. You are confident that this is temporary as a result of recent increased expectations by leaders.

Leaders and teachers have focussed many of their efforts on improving the achievement of Year 11 students with targeted support and intervention. While students in Year 11 are grateful, students in Year 10 feel that they are not the priority. Your short-term plans recognise the need for a more balanced and sustainable approach to improving all students' achievement.

You have clarified guidance to teachers regarding your expectations of marking. We observed in our visits to lessons that marking was strong in some subjects and quite poor in others. Some teachers give students a detailed understanding of what they are doing well and how they can improve. You acknowledge that others are not marking to the same standard. You are keen to improve this further so that you can continue to encourage more frequent students' responses to feedback from teachers.

You have simplified your literacy marking policy so that teachers and students find it easier to use. While this is well used by some teachers, we saw that this is not consistent. Where it is not used effectively, it is having little impact on improving students' spelling, punctuation and grammar. You have introduced weekly reading time for students in English. Students who I spoke to were disappointingly indifferent to this. You are clear that more needs to be done to instil more positive reading attitudes and habits. You are pleased with the impact of recent training for teachers on developing students' use of extended writing. Some teachers report that they are beginning to see some improvements in students' writing skills and confidence. Where possible, they are keen to develop these, particularly by removing scaffolding such as writing frames.

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

External support

You have made significant use of a behaviour and teaching consultant to support teachers' management of behaviour. This has given some teachers a renewed clarity about how they can make improvements to their teaching which impact on students' behaviour.

You continue to use informal links with local schools to model good or outstanding practice for teachers and leaders. Teachers are extremely positive about using other schools' strong provision to reflect on improvements in their own teaching. Taking this forward, you convey a very clear desire that leaders at Hackney UTC develop their role in leading improvements to teaching.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Pennington
Her Majesty's Inspector