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7 May 2014

Christopher McGraw
Aldercar Community Language College
Daltons Close
Langley Mill
Nottingham
NG16 4HL

Dear Mr McGraw

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Aldercar Community Language College

Following my visit to your school on 7 May 2014 with Elizabeth Macfarlane, Additional Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in February 2103. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely

Susan Barkway
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2013

- Improve teaching and learning throughout the school, but particularly in English, to a level that is consistently good or better by ensuring that:
 - the work set for students is well matched to their difference abilities and is always sufficiently challenging
 - teachers do not dominate by talking too much in lessons, so that students get more time to work independently
 - the marking of pupils' work provides clear and detailed feedback about how well they have done and what they need to do to improve.

- Raise attainment and accelerate progress, particularly in English, by ensuring that:
 - the gaps in attainment and progress between different groups of students are narrowed so that they all achieve equally well
 - students who are persistently absent achieve better examination results by attending more regularly.

- Ensure leaders secure more rapid improvement by:
 - tackling inadequate teaching more decisively
 - ensuring there is greater consistency in the quality of teaching and marking across all subjects
 - sharing more widely the good and outstanding practice that currently exists in the school
 - ensuring that the governing body holds school leaders more closely to account for improving the quality of teaching and achievement.

- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 7 May 2014

Evidence

The inspection took place over one day and was carried out by two additional inspectors. During the inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher, senior leaders and heads of faculty for English, mathematics and science. The inspectors held telephone conversations with representatives of the governing body and met with a local authority representative. They visited 12 parts of lessons, ten of which were joint observations with members of the senior leadership team, and they looked at samples of students' work. The inspectors also reviewed school documentation, including attendance records and student performance data, and looked carefully at the school's central record of checks on staff.

Context

The principal retired at the end of the spring term. A new substantive appointment has not yet been made but one of the deputy principals has been appointed as acting principal for this term. In addition, two members of staff are currently on maternity leave. Temporary maternity cover is in place and their leadership responsibilities are being covered internally by experienced staff. There have been no other significant changes since the last monitoring inspection.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The acting principal demonstrates a good awareness of the strengths of the school and the next steps for development. He is supported well by other members of the senior leadership team. There are clear signs of improvement in both the quality of teaching and in the achievement of students. For example, predicted outcomes for five A* to C in GCSE examinations, including English and mathematics, indicate that the improving trend from 2013 is expected to be maintained in 2014. In addition, the proportion of students expected to make three levels of progress across the Key Stages 3 and 4 is likely to increase significantly, and there are improvements to the proportion expected to make four levels of progress. If achieved, these outcomes would be very pleasing. In English, which was a particular area of weakness at the last section 5 inspection, attainment and progress of students is improving rapidly. This is the result of strong leadership of the faculty, better teaching and more rigorous tracking of data on students' achievements.

Heads of Faculty for English, mathematics and science know their faculties well. They have an accurate understanding of strengths and areas for development, and are proactive in implementing strategies for improvements. They track information on students' progress rigorously and carry out monitoring activities to evaluate and help to improve the quality of teaching. As a result, mathematics has maintained good outcomes, science continues to improve and there have been significant improvements in the quality of teaching and students' achievement in English.

The Chair of the Governing Body is clear about the way in which governors can and should contribute to school improvement. Following an internal review, the governing body was reconstituted, and new members have received induction and training on their roles and responsibilities. They are becoming increasingly effective at providing an appropriate level of challenge and support. For example, the provision of regular and more accessible information about the work of the school is enabling them to ask questions about students' achievements and the progress made by different groups. However, the planned external review of the governing body has not yet been carried out. It would be helpful if this was done as a matter of urgency so that governors are clear about ways in which they can further strengthen their role.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Gaps in attainment and progress between different groups of students are narrowing rapidly, including for those students who are eligible for pupil premium funding.
- More-able students are making much better progress, particularly in English.
- Assessments of students' progress in reading indicate significant increase in the proportion of students who are able to read at or above the level expected for their age. This is a result of an increased focus on reading throughout the school.
- A wide range of well-planned professional development opportunities are helping to improve the quality of teaching and achievement across the school.
- In the majority of lessons, work set for students is well matched to their different abilities and there is sufficient challenge, including for the more able.
- Attendance has improved and there are far fewer students who are persistently absent.
- Behaviour in lessons is good. This is because students are engaged and involved in the range of tasks and activities planned by the teachers.
- The number of permanent and fixed-term exclusions have reduced significantly over time.
- Leaders and managers make accurate judgements about the quality of teaching.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Although there is evidence of some very effective marking, this is not yet consistent. For example, in some subjects, students are either not given precise information on how they can improve their work or teachers do not ensure that students learn from the feedback. When this happens, students are not sure what they need to do to reach the next level and they continue to repeat the same mistakes in their work.
- There are support plans to improve teaching. However, these are insufficiently focused on specific targets for improvement and they do not set out clear timescales or record evidence that success criteria are being met.

External support

The local authority continues to provide very good support to the school. It works closely with the school to secure improvement. For example, regular reviews are carried out to monitor progress against school improvement targets and the governing body includes a representative from the senior leadership team of the local authority. These strategies ensure that there is a close working relationship and the level of challenge is increased. In addition, the local authority has provided tailored professional development and coaching for individual members of staff which has helped to improve the quality of teaching.