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Mr Steve Gordon
Headteacher
Huxlow Science College
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Dear Mr Gordon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Huxlow Science College

Following my visit to your academy on 16 July 2014, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 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. The school should take further action to:

- embed the marking, feedback and presentation of students' work policy so that it is consistently applied to a high standard by all teachers
- raise expectations about students' attitudes across the school and improve attendance, especially at Key Stage 4
- sharpen up action plans by ensuring that monitoring and evaluation activities and roles are detailed and clearly set out.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, subject leaders, two teachers responsible for attendance and behaviour and The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans, the academy's latest achievement data and other monitoring documentation were evaluated. I visited a range of classes with you during which I spoke to students informally and looked at their exercise books.

Context

Since the last inspection you have appointed an acting assistant headteacher to take the lead for developing marking and feedback and have given a teaching and learning responsibility position to the current head of physical education. A substantive deputy headteacher, head of information, communication and technology, head of mathematics and three more teachers of mathematics have all been recruited to start in September.

Main findings

You and your senior leaders have wasted no time in putting together strong plans to address the areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection. The actions you will take for most of the areas are appropriate and rightly focus on improving classroom practice. There are sharply focused success criteria so that impact can be measured securely. Currently, the plans lack clarity regarding the way the actions will be monitored and evaluated; this means that governors, for example, may not be able to hold the school to account effectively because their role in the plan is not clear enough. You have taken swift action to strengthen leadership to ensure that improvements have a clear line of accountability. New appointments to the leadership team have already impacted positively on the quality of teaching; for example, marking and feedback has improved greatly since the section 5 inspection. The quality of some students' responses and the presentation of their work are still not consistently good across the school. However, effective leadership in this area has meant that subject leaders are now much clearer about their role in ensuring high standards.

You have ensured that teachers are provided with important and accessible information about students' progress which they use to plan their lessons with greater precision. Learning plans and the academy's 'essential information' (a summary of key class assessment information and follow-up action by the teacher) show that due consideration is made by teachers to ensure that different ability groups make progress. This improved use and understanding of students' assessments and improved departmental leadership has led to positive outcomes for students in mathematics; current reliable predictions suggest that students are now

making rapid progress towards national benchmarks in both Key Stage 3 and 4. This is a marked improvement compared to previous years.

Students behave in a calm and orderly manner in and around the academy. Work to develop their attitudes to learning further and to improve the attendance of targeted students is at an early stage of implementation. Some recent robust actions taken to tackle attendance issues have seen demonstrable success in Year 7 and 8, although strategies at Key Stage 4 have been less successful. Strong new leadership has been introduced to improve students' attitudes and engagement. Clear effective strategies to improve the achievement of students eligible for pupil premium funding have been put into place. These are closely monitored by governors and the senior leadership team; it has been too early for them to see any impact of these strategies.

Members of the governing body continue to provide valuable support and challenge to school leaders. Governors have been keen to develop their effectiveness and have played a key role in improving how the school sets out its action plans to make them more coherent. They recognise that their role in the plans should be more explicit; they are exploring different ways to establish first-hand information about how the school is doing in order to improve their effectiveness in holding leaders to account.

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 benefited from being part of a consortium of schools called the Pilgrim Learning Trust. This cluster of schools has provided important support in the academy's development of subject leadership as well as providing an important external view of the academy's work. The mathematics department has received specific support which has contributed to positive outcomes. You have also enlisted the services of a strong senior teacher of a middle school to support your improvement plans for Key Stage 3. An ex- HMI has been commissioned to carry out reviews of the academy's progress, further strengthening your leadership.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, DfE Academies Advisers Unit, The Education Funding Agency (EFA) and the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Zarina Connolly
Her Majesty's Inspector