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Ms S Turner
Chosen Hill School
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Dear Ms Turner

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Chosen Hill School

Following my visit to your academy on Thursday 18 September 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 May 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 academy should take further action to:

- increase the rate of improvement in teaching
- check students' progress more frequently.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, subject leaders and the Chair and three other members the Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. We also undertook an extensive tour of the academy, visiting lessons in a range of subjects and different year groups, including the sixth form. I also took opportunities to hold informal discussions with a number of students of all ages. The academy's improvement and action plans were evaluated and we had detailed discussions about students' achievement, including the latest 2014 examination results.

Context

The last inspection report noted significant changes in the academy's senior leadership and governance; these new roles are now well established. There has been a significant change in staffing since the inspection with 23 new teachers joining the school in September; this is one-quarter of the teaching staff.

Main findings

The academy's headteacher, senior leaders, key subject leaders and Governing Body have the capacity to secure the rapid and sustained improvement required to turn this into a good school. All have a forensic understanding of what the academy needs to improve. Appropriate and well-planned actions are already in place to deal with these, although the pace of improvement needs to be more rapid to meet the academy's ambitions.

The academy's professional development programme for teachers is sharply focused on the key areas needing improvement. Much of the training is led by teachers with proven expertise. There is increased use of collaborative working across subjects to share the good and better practice in the academy.

The last inspection report noted improvements in students' achievement at that time and this trend of improvement has continued. The 2014 GCSE examination results confirmed significant improvements in students' achievement in English and mathematics and there were notably strong performances in some other subjects.

However, there are still some areas requiring further improvement, particularly the achievement of boys in English, especially their writing. The achievement of a small number of students eligible for free school meals, particularly in mathematics, needs to improve significantly. Other students supported by the Pupil Premium and those whose parents are serving in the armed forces do better.

While the 2014 A-level results were encouraging, the results of many students at the end of Year 12 were not good enough. The senior leader responsible for the sixth form has put in place a range of measures to check students' suitability for courses, raise the quality of teaching and improve students' preparation for lessons. The introduction of compulsory directed study time for all students is already making a difference. Sixth form students are very positive about the information they receive about sixth form programmes, the quality of the provision and about the support they receive.

A range of strategies to improve the quality of teaching was in place before the end of the last school year, but reinforced from the start of this term. Teachers are absolutely clear about the 'non-negotiables' and evidence from the lessons visited show that all are being used in all lessons. These strategies include: improved systems for marking students' work, giving them feedback and expectations about how this is followed up; sharper lesson planning with greater clarity about the learning expected; and wider use of extended writing.

However, observations indicate that not all teachers are fully comfortable with these strategies and their use seems 'a little forced'. This reduces the pace of the lesson and students' learning. The greater use of extended writing across a very wide range of subjects has highlighted weaknesses in many students' writing, even in, for example, Year 9. These are not the students that would be identified for early intervention in Years 7 and 8. The roles of the English department and other subject leaders in tackling this are not yet clear.

The last inspection report recommended that teachers make better use of questioning. The approach taken by many to make sure they include all of the expected strategies leads to lessons that are not very interactive. Little use is made of questioning to deepen understanding and challenge students' thinking. These opportunities to match learning more closely to individual students' current level of progress are not yet fully developed.

In the lessons observed, all students were working hard and doing what was expected of them. However, in some lessons they did not show any real enthusiasm for the work. Some Year 10 and 11 students made a point of talking to me about how they could do more to make the school good. They acknowledge that they needed to 'up their game', but would appreciate some teachers setting them higher levels of challenge.

Reviews of the quality of teaching are based securely on students' progress and checks on the quality of their work, as well as observations of lessons. There are good systems for tracking students' progress, but checks on progress, including in the sixth form, are not frequent enough.

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 maintains good links with the local authority, is involved in its various networks and attends many of the events the authority organises. Senior leaders have also attended seminars organised by Ofsted and have plans to attend future events. The academy arranges any additional external support it requires. I agreed that I would help make arrangements for the headteacher, other senior leaders and governors to work with good and outstanding schools to help with specific aspects of the academy improvement plan.

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

Yours sincerely

James Sage
Her Majesty's Inspector