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Mr Mick Hill
Executive Principal
Northallerton College
Grammar School Lane
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Dear Mr Hill

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Northallerton College, North Yorkshire

Following my visit with Lee Owston Her Majesty's Inspector to your school on 14 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 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 November 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- ensure that senior leaders take more direct responsibility for checking that actions to improve teaching are making a discernible difference and responding decisively where they are not, or where the pace of change is too slow
- use the links the local authority has agreed to facilitate to develop provision and subject leadership in mathematics more quickly
- make judgements about teaching quality with greater emphasis on the impact on students' progress over time, being very clear about any variability in the progress of different groups.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, a group of middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. A range of documents were reviewed including lesson observation records, records of learning walks and plans for improvement. The inspector undertook visits to lessons with the Executive Principal and also with the Vice Principal.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection changes have been made to leadership roles and responsibilities below the level of the Executive Principal. The Vice Principal is new to post since the inspection. An Assistant Principal was appointed in January 2014 to manage day-to-day operational matters, leaving other senior staff to focus on the strategic direction of the college, in particular on moving the college's overall effectiveness to good.

Main findings

Too much responsibility for improving teaching has been delegated too quickly to subject leaders, particularly in the case of mathematics. Senior leaders have not taken enough responsibility for ensuring that actions intended to improve provision make a clear difference in classrooms and where they do not, responding decisively.

Reversing the declining trend in achievement in mathematics represents a significant challenge. Currently too much responsibility for tackling this job is placed on the shoulders of the subject leader. We visited mathematics lessons together and you agreed that improvement initiatives had not bitten sharply enough in this subject. Our subsequent conversation with the Chair of Governors, other senior leaders and a representative of the local authority, was productive in agreeing a way forward for developing mathematics provision more quickly.

My visits to other lessons with the Vice Principal revealed a much livelier pace of learning. Students' were thoroughly engaged in activities that had captured their interest. Attitudes to learning were notably more positive on this second learning walk. Students' displayed mature behaviour as they discussed their work with one another and shared thoughts and ideas. This is valuable capital that could be exploited more successfully in mathematics.

The regular monitoring of teaching places too much emphasis on a 'snapshot' taken in a lesson and too little emphasis on the impact of teaching on students' progress over time, particularly when these judgements are for the purpose of performance management. The college has not established a formal link with a stronger mathematics department in a good or outstanding school - a missed opportunity for staff to see what top-end mathematics teaching looks like and gain a fresh perspective on developing learning materials.

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

Over time the local authority's intervention has not had an appreciable impact on the college's effectiveness. While the responsibility for improvement ultimately rests with the college, the local authority needs to raise its expectations of these senior leaders. Since the inspection the local authority has stepped up its support in mathematics through a subject adviser working with individual teachers - a detailed evaluation on the impact of this work on teaching quality was not available to inspectors. The local authority has agreed to quickly facilitate links with a stronger mathematics department/s in North Yorkshire secondary schools, and to provide support to governors to increase further the level of challenge they provide to the college about the impact of work to improve provision and outcomes.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for North Yorkshire.

Yours sincerely

Cathryn Kirby

Her Majesty's Inspector