

PROTECT-INSPECTION

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Mrs J Taylor, Principal
Thomas Deacon Academy
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Peterborough
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Dear Mrs Taylor

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thomas Deacon Academy

Following my visit to your school on 18 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 July 2013. 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:

- strengthen accountability by making targets and milestones clearer in college leaders' plans, showing how these relate to students' starting points and standards attained nationally
- increase the focus of the board of directors on the progress made by different groups of students, gathering more first-hand evidence as a basis for challenging academy leaders
- build on the steps being taken to raise the profile of student leadership across the academy by evaluating the impact of teaching on students' initiative, inquiry and independence.

During the visit, I held meetings with you, three college leaders, the literacy coordinator and the Chairman of the Board of Directors. I evaluated the school improvement plan, reviewed monitoring records, scrutinised a sample of students' work and teachers' marking, and visited classes to see students and staff at work.

Context

Since the inspection, the Principal and two Vice-Principals have left the academy. Following the arrival of a new Principal and Vice-Principal at the start of term the leadership team has been restructured. Assistant Principals now lead a college (curriculum area) and wider responsibility.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have:

- written an academy improvement plan that is aligned to the key inspection issues and is focused on 'getting to good' within a year
- made clearer who is responsible for leading academy-wide improvements
- provided a professional development programme for staff, to improve the quality of teaching: lesson planning; questioning; assessment; marking; active learning
- increased the range and frequency of monitoring activities.

You have made a swift pace of improvement a clear expectation. This is reflected in your plans and challenging targets, your direct communication to staff, students, parents and carers, and your high visibility in lessons and around the academy. Your approach has set an example to the new leadership team, who have taken responsibility for academy-wide improvements alongside leadership of curriculum areas with great determination. However, although you have successfully given greater emphasis to students' progress, college leaders' plans do not contain enough information about standards to show how overall academy targets will be reached through their curriculum areas.

The leadership of teaching provides an example of actions that are starting to take effect. For example, staff are giving students more detailed feedback about how to reach a higher standard of work. Students' books show that some staff have improved the quality of their marking considerably since the start of term. Students' work shows some improvement in their spelling and punctuation as result. However, sharper monitoring by academy leaders has rightly identified the quality of students' responses to marking as an area in need of further improvement overall. Not enough feedback is followed-up by practise to demonstrate the impact on raising standards.

Better monitoring of teaching is enabling you to promote more productive collaboration between staff, through the 'professional learning partnerships' to which all belong. Although at an early stage, staff are benefitting from more knowledge of their specific strengths and areas for development gained through learning walks, work scrutiny and discussions with students that complement lesson observations. Your more rigorous criteria for judging the quality of teaching, which includes a stronger focus on what students' know, understand and are able to do as a result of teaching, is helping to improve the quality and use of teachers' self-evaluation.

However, the impact of teaching on students' attitudes and approaches to learning is not evaluated routinely enough to help accelerate your drive to increase student leadership.

External support

Since starting at the academy you have collaborated with other school and academy leaders, locally and nationally. Consultancy and moderation has already had an impact on making data more reliable and its use more robust. Your participation in the 'partners in excellence' initiative exemplifies your approach to improvement; sharing the academy's strengths while learning from, and adapting, best practice.

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

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Board of Directors and the Director of Children's Services for Peterborough.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector