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Mr Howard Kemp
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Dear Mr Kemp

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Farringdon Community Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 5 December 2017, 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 November 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can do and achieve, so that pupils make at least good progress from their different starting points
- revise development plans so they focus precisely on actions to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
- ensure that middle leaders are increasingly more accountable so that recommendations from subject reviews are followed through and show impact on raising pupils' achievement
- increase the level of challenge in lessons by providing opportunities for pupils to

grapple with their learning

- improve attendance and reduce persistent absence, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, and members of the senior and middle leadership teams. I also met with the new headteacher who will take up post in January 2018. During the inspection, I met with the school improvement partner from Durham Education Partnership. I examined a range of documents, including the school development plan, the school's self-evaluation, assessment information, governing body minutes and attendance records. I met with three members of the governing body, including the chair and vice chair of governors. I visited lessons with you and the deputy headteacher. I scrutinised a sample of pupils' work with the assistant headteacher who has responsibility for teaching and learning. I talked to a group of Year 9 and 10 pupils.

Context

Since the previous inspection, you have restructured the senior leadership team. This has included the appointment of a new deputy headteacher in September 2017. You also appointed a new head of English in September 2017.

Main findings

Areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report have not been tackled swiftly enough. Although leaders, including governors, and the wider staff team are united in their desire to improve the school, little has been done to increase the pace of change. Action plans are not precise enough and insufficient attention is paid to actions that will improve the quality of teaching and learning. Plans lack measurable success criteria and interim milestones that will enable leaders and governors to judge the impact of actions accurately. As a result, improvements have been too slow and the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection remain the main priorities for the school. Leaders and governors recognise this and more concise plans are in place for January 2018.

Provisional results for 2017 indicate that pupils did not make good progress in their GCSEs by the end of Year 11. There remains too much variability between departments. For example, pupils' attainment in geography remains below the national average, while history outcomes have improved. Leaders have introduced more robust systems to track the progress of pupils. Current assessment information shows some improvement. For example, differences are diminishing between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and that of their peers. However, this is not rapid enough and too many pupils do not make good progress from their different starting points. A new assessment system has recently been introduced in

key stage 3, but it is too early to judge the impact on pupils' progress and the standards they achieve.

Middle leaders are starting to be more accountable for the work of their departments. Leaders are beginning to identify next steps for improvement following reviews of their subjects. However, subsequent action plans are not precise enough. Action plans do not include interim milestones to judge the progress of actions and time frames for improvement are not tight enough. Leaders are not sufficiently meticulous in analysing the effect of actions taken. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning has not improved at a fast enough pace. This is not the case in English, where new leadership is leading to some improvements in the quality of teaching.

Professional development has not had the impact leaders anticipated. Many professional development sessions have been voluntary. Consequently, there is still too much variability in the quality of teaching across subjects and year groups. The work seen in pupils' books during the inspection shows that there are still too many pupils not completing work to a good standard. There is a lack of challenge in lessons. Although some of the most able pupils achieved a higher proportion of top grades in their GCSEs, based on provisional outcomes for 2017, this is not representative of good progress.

Pupils are compliant in their learning. They lack the resilience to learn from their mistakes and tackle tasks that are more demanding. This is because teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can do and achieve. Leaders acknowledge this and have devised more appropriate plans to improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, as these plans are only recently written, it is too early to judge the impact of them.

Although personal development, behaviour and welfare were judged good at the previous inspection, leaders acknowledge that attendance has since declined. Overall attendance rates were below the national averages last academic year. Persistent absence was particularly high. Leaders are beginning to track attendance more robustly. Nevertheless, current attendance rates are still below the national averages and persistent absence is particularly high in Years 10 and 11.

Plans to improve the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils have been revised and are now more fit for purpose. They identify barriers to good attendance and progress for disadvantaged pupils. A team of staff, led by the assistant headteacher, are now implementing the plan more effectively. However, it is too early to judge the impact of leaders' actions.

Governors are aspirational for the school and they are passionate about improving the quality of provision. Minutes of governing body meetings show that governors ask challenging questions of school leaders. Governors regularly review their skills and bring a wealth of experience to their role. Consequently, governance is

increasingly strong. Governors show a good understanding of the actions needed to improve the school. However, they acknowledge that the pace of change since the previous inspection has not been rapid enough.

External support

Since the previous inspection, the school has commissioned a review of the geography department and a whole-school review by Durham Education Partnership. The review documents are comprehensive and provide the school with recommendations for improvement. However, implementation of these recommendations has not been quick enough.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michele Costello
Her Majesty's Inspector