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31 January 2014

Mr Miles Bacon  
Headteacher  
Thurstable School Sports College and Sixth Form Centre  
Maypole Road  
Tiptree  
Colchester  
CO5 0EW

Dear Mr Bacon

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thurstable School Sports College and Sixth Form Centre**

Following my visit to your school on 30 January 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 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 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:

- ensure that all teachers follow the school's literacy policy when marking work so that students are aware of, and can correct, their errors in spelling and punctuation
- enable all students to respond to feedback from their teachers that makes clear how they can improve
- ensure the school's plans consistently make clear how much progress is expected towards targets at each interim point prior to their final deadline for completion.

## **Evidence**

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other senior and middle leaders, students, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's improvement plans, made brief visits to a number of lessons and examined documents relating to the outcomes of monitoring activities and the impact of performance management.

## **Context**

An additional teacher has joined the English department.

## **Main findings**

You and your senior leaders have established clear, appropriate and ambitious priorities, based on the results of a searching and secure evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Your colleagues understand their roles and responsibilities in driving forward improvement because school plans and policies make expectations clear. You have made alterations to timetabling, staffing allocations and the curriculum within English to help provide additional support for students identified to be at risk of making insufficient progress and recent monitoring data indicates they are beginning to catch up. Systems to monitor the quality of teaching, marking and other areas of the academy's work that were in place before the previous inspection have been developed and extended. When marking, some teachers do not ensure that students respond to feedback on their work that tells them how to improve, or that mistakes in spelling or punctuation are corrected.

Senior colleagues are acting quickly when problems are identified to provide teachers with timely support to help them to improve and meet their challenging targets. New arrangements are ensuring those who are falling behind, or capable of completing more demanding work, receive support or challenge more quickly than was the case at the time of the previous inspection. Support for students who require additional help with reading and writing is helping those who join the academy to develop the literacy skills they need to learn effectively in all subjects. There is clear evidence that recent efforts to encourage reading for pleasure have had a considerable impact. Teachers and other adults who support the learning of the more able and those with special educational needs are now working together to plan lesson activities that are precisely-tailored to the needs of individuals.

Governors meet regularly to monitor the extent of progress towards the academy's plans, review the extent of the progress different groups of students are making, and ask challenging questions. They are visiting the academy and gaining an understanding of the way in which leaders make judgements about standards. The

academy's improvement plans do not always make clear how much progress towards each long-term objective should be evident by certain points in the academic year, which limits the ability of governors to monitor effectively.

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 local authority has identified aspects of good and outstanding practice in other institutions and subject leaders spoke positively during the inspection about what they have learned from visits to other schools. A local authority adviser has also helped the academy to complete appropriate improvement plans by reviewing provision in specific subject areas and offering guidance. The local authority has made good use of funding available to provide additional tuition for students in English.

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

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**