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Mrs Pauline Montalto
Headteacher
Thomas Bennett Community College
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Dear Mrs Montalto

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thomas Bennett Community College

Following my visit to your school on 1 December 2014, 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 October 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders, governors and the proprietor are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- clarify the amount of money available to support teachers' training
- improve information and communication technology so that it supports learning more effectively
- clarify senior leaders' responsibilities so that there is an even sharper focus on improving teaching

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, a representative of the governing body, the recently-appointed executive headteacher and a representative of the proprietor The Kemnal Academies Trust (TKAT) to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's action plan and a range of other documents. You led me on the tour of the school and I looked at a selection of students' work.

Context

Since the inspection, a number of teachers have resigned. The proprietor has commissioned a review of governance which is scheduled for later this month. New members of staff have been recruited and most will commence their roles at the beginning of next term. One new staff governor has been elected. There remain vacancies for one parent governor and two foundation governors.

Main findings

You have acted quickly with your small senior leadership team to address many of the areas for improvement raised at the section 5 inspection. You have tightened-up the way teachers are to assess students' work. You have also implemented a new assessment policy so that there is more consistency in the regularity and quality of teachers' marking. Senior leaders have rightly increased the frequency with which they visit lessons.

Senior leaders have recently increased their knowledge of the academy's financial position. Before the inspection, they had insufficient information on which to base important spending decisions. They did not always have the money available to make necessary changes such as replacing out-of-date computers or other items of hardware. Senior leaders have also improved the quality and reliability of information they have about what students know, understand and can do. They ask teachers to check students' learning more frequently and compare their assessments with teachers in other schools locally. Over time, this means that teachers' assessments are increasingly reliable. Senior leaders are enabling teachers in the academy to share more regularly with each other how well students are doing and this is beginning to accelerate students' progress.

Middle leaders are beginning to take more responsibility for students' progress in their subjects. They are holding subject teachers more readily to account. With senior leaders, they are rightly raising teachers' expectations of the students. In mathematics, all students will, for example, enter the higher tier GCSE paper in 2015 so that they have a greater chance of achieving a good pass. Middle leaders are more frequently checking teachers' marking, ably supported by senior leaders. As a result, there have been recent and rapid improvements in the quality of feedback

many students receive on their work. Students' presentation is also improving as the majority know now that their work will be checked.

There remains, however, a significant minority of teaching which is less effective. Some teachers still do not mark work frequently enough or in enough detail. A few teachers do not challenge students to work to the best of their ability or intervene quickly enough to ensure students are not easily distracted.

TKAT had already appointed a new executive headteacher at the time of the inspection. The executive headteacher has a realistic view of the academy and what needs to improve quickly. He will work with you from January onwards, to ensure that the pace of improvement increases. This full-time extra senior leader will enable you to concentrate more intently on driving improvements to teaching.

TKAT has commissioned a review of the governance of the academy. They are building on an internal re-structuring that took place prior to the inspection. They have recognised that senior leaders did not have sufficiently accurate information, for example, about the academy's finances. TKAT's deputy chief executive officer acted quickly to provide a clear statement about the overall budget for the next three years during my visit.

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

Senior leaders from TKAT have brokered the support of an effective and experienced headteacher from a nearby school who is monitoring the academy on TKAT's behalf. This strengthens the strategic leadership of the academy. Judgements of the quality of teaching and learning are improving as the external supporter is a trained additional inspector. Part-time support for the academy's financial management is currently provided by a business manager from another TKAT academy locally.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector