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Tim Croft
Sutton Community Academy
High Pavement
Sutton-in-Ashfield
NG17 1EE

Dear Mr Croft

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sutton Community Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 28 November 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 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 September 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- develop specific strategies actions to improve students' oral communication skills
- strengthen the role of middle leaders in driving forward the improvement of the academy.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the Principal, senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and the academy's improvement director to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The action plan was evaluated, and a number of other documents were scrutinised. I undertook brief visits to lessons, accompanied by a senior leader, and looked at the quality of work in students' books.

Context

You have now appointed a special educational needs coordinator who will take up post in January 2015.

Main findings

You have taken swift, determined and appropriate action to address the areas of improvement identified in the recent section 5 inspection.

You have devised a detailed action plan to set out the academy's strategic direction. The plan sets out in detail how the key priorities will be addressed and evaluated, and is linked to challenging targets. There are some minor amendments to be made. For example, the action plan highlights how students' written literacy will be developed, but needs to include specific actions to improve students' oral communication. The role of middle leaders in driving improvement needs to be made more explicit. You have agreed to amend the action plan to meet these requirements and submit it to me by 19 December 2014.

You now have higher expectations of your teachers, and senior leaders have a clearer system of holding them to account for the achievement of their students. You have ensured that pay awards for teachers are more closely linked to the achievement of students. The school's programme of quality assurance now involves subject leaders, who report to you and governors on the progress students are making in their departments. They also ensure that teachers are using accurate assessment data to set challenging targets for students. Leaders take a wider range of information into account when judging the quality of teaching. This includes progress that students make in the lesson, as well as over time. As a result, leaders at all levels are more rigorous in their judgements of teaching, and you have a much more realistic picture of the overall quality of teaching.

You have adjusted the academy's programme of training for teachers so that is linked to their specific development needs, as well as to the academy's priorities for improvement. You have implemented a system of coaching which is helping to ensure that all teachers can learn from the best practice in the academy.

You have sensibly brokered links with partner schools to support improvements to teaching, to allow subject leaders to learn from best practice elsewhere and to ensure that assessment is accurate.

Teachers increasingly focus on the progress of different groups, including the most able, and now have a performance target related to the progress of this group. They have begun to ask more challenging questions of more-able students in class, and to give these students specific strategies to achieve higher grades. You have amended the curriculum so that it more appropriate to the needs of the more able. For example, they will be able to study separate sciences from next September.

Improvements to teaching and leadership in mathematics are now having greater impact. You have appointed a specialist tutor to intervene with students who are at risk of underachieving, while all students have been offered extra sessions at the end of the academy day. These sessions are well-attended. As a result of these measures, the proportion of students making expected, and more than expected progress in mathematics is rising strongly.

You have undertaken a review of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and have ensured that there are increased opportunities for students to develop their knowledge and understanding of the British political system. You are developing further strategies to help students develop their communication skills, but these are not yet fully formed.

You are currently undertaking a staffing review.

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

External support

Governors continue to play an important role in setting the strategic direction of the academy, and have responded positively and with renewed vigour to the inspection judgement. They have drawn up their own action plan in response to the inspection, and have restructured both the constitution of the governing body and the programme of meetings to ensure that they are focused on monitoring progress against the key priorities.

You continue to receive effective support from the Academy Transformation Trust. You have a dedicated improvement director, whose frequent and focused visits to the academy are helping to monitor progress against targets. This support has included ongoing support for the mathematics department, the 6th form and the special educational needs department.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Nottinghamshire local authority and as below.

Yours sincerely

Deirdre Duignan

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Nottinghamshire local authority
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority – the Academy Transformation Trust
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA)
- DfE - Academies Advisers Unit [open.FREEACADEMYS@education.gsi.gov.uk]