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1 June 2015

Ms Beverley Matthews  
Headteacher  
Thornhill Community Academy  
Valley Drive  
Dewsbury  
West Yorkshire  
WF12 0HE

Dear Ms Matthews

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thornhill Community Academy, Kirklees**

Following my visit to your school on 3 June 2015, 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 February 2015. 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:

- improve teacher expectations regarding the quality of pupils' handwriting and the presentation of written work
- review the roles of senior and middle leaders to ensure a more balanced distribution of responsibilities and a sharp focus on the main priorities for improvement.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, members of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and two of the school's trustees to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's action plans were evaluated. Pupil's work in books was scrutinised. The outcomes of internal monitoring were evaluated.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection a new headteacher has been appointed. You began your new post two days before this monitoring inspection on 1 June 2015. Also, recruitment has taken place to appoint several new teachers some of whom start their posts in June and others on 1 September 2015. This is ensuring the school will have a full complement of staff in time for the start of the new academic year. An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium has been completed by an external consultant.

## **Main findings**

You and your senior staff and the Governing Body have accepted the findings of the recent inspection. You committed time prior to starting in post and worked with senior leaders and governors to respond quickly to the issues raised by the inspection report. This is much appreciated by staff and governors.

An action plan is in place with suitable targets to improve the quality of teaching and the standards achieved by pupils. The Governing Body were involved in the planning and their views inform the intended actions. An external consultant evaluated the plan. The plan provides a detailed record of actions, who is responsible, how improvement will be made and success criteria at certain milestones. However, it is a lengthy document and not easy to access for governors. A review should be undertaken and the main points produced in a summary which is easy to read and which can be used by governors to hold school leaders to account for progress and improvement.

The review of the academy's use of the pupil premium was prompt. It is critical of the school's evaluation of the impact of additional funds. Notably, the report highlights that staff and governors show a significant lack of knowledge about the strategies used to intervene with pupils eligible for this funding. In response, led by you and your senior team, an action plan has been produced which addresses the findings in the report. The plan is sharp and comprehensive and governors are knowledgeable about the intended actions.

You are raising expectations about standards and the quality of teaching. There is a tangible confidence among governors and senior leaders about the pace and early impact of changes being made. You have reviewed the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders taking into account the new expertise which you bring to the school and the skills of other senior leaders. This has been welcomed by staff. The roles of middle leaders need a similar review. The balance of responsibilities is heavily weighted on senior staff. The school's improvement priorities require a more equitable distribution in order that individual senior staff may put more time and effort into the main issues.

You and senior leaders have produced revised guidance and new procedures for teacher's marking of pupils' work and improvements to pupils' extended writing. Inspection evidence shows that these initiatives, whilst relatively new, are being consistently implemented across the school departments. For example, in all pupils' work seen there is regular use of 'even better if' (EBI) comments from teachers and 'my response is' (MRI) comments back from pupils. These are collated onto one sheet and used at the end of each half term when pupils apply these improvement points as they review and redraft a piece of extended writing.

There are examples of significant improvement to the quality of some pupils' extended writing. This is variable and for too few pupils. In particular, the impact of new guidance is not resulting in enough improvement in the general standard of pupils' written presentation and especially in regard to pupils' handwriting.

A number of school to school partnerships are in place providing additional expertise and capacity for improvement. You have put in place a strategy to coordinate these partnerships. It aims to share best practice, borrow ideas, establish networks, provide staff development and to concentrate on addressing the priorities raised in the inspection report. Early impact is evidenced in new homework booklets which highlight past examination questions and encourage extended writing. Also, the school has liaised with an examination board advisor to support the school's guidance for pupils about assessment tasks.

The recruitment procedures recently used by the school for the post of headteacher and other teaching roles are robust. In particular, they ensure that appointments are made which are well matched to the needs of the school. For example, your own significant and successful experience with regard to the use of the pupil premium. Equally, the procedures ensure that appointments are only made when a sufficiently high quality applicant is available, as shown by the decision not to appoint to one post.

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

### **External support**

Local school partnerships provide effective support to develop expertise and staff skills. The local authority provides additional funding for advice and support from a school improvement consultant. The school engages external consultants to support leader's monitoring and evaluation. The external review of the academy's use of pupil premium provides a sharp and helpful evaluation.

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

Yours sincerely

John Coleman

**Senior Her Majesty's Inspector**