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Mrs Di Beddow
Acting Headteacher
Ernulf Academy
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Dear Mrs Beddow

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ernulf Academy

Following my visit to your school on 5 November 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2014. 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 in order to become a good academy.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, four other leaders, three members of the governing body and the executive headteacher from the St Neots Learning Partnership. A number of short visits to mathematics, science and modern foreign language lessons were undertaken where I spoke to pupils and looked at their work.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection the headteacher has left and been replaced by you. You are carrying out the role as acting headteacher until the end of December 2015. The sixth form has been closed temporarily and pupils attend the partner

school sixth form at St Neots Sixth Form Centre. A number of teachers and leaders have left the academy and been replaced by new staff.

Main findings

You have led marked improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and leadership since the last visit. You have raised the expectations of the whole academy community about the quality of education for pupils. On arriving at the site I was impressed by the improvements to appearance. There is now evident pride in keeping the site tidy, clean and fit for learning. Displays are bright and attractive and a culture of high expectations is being established. The governors, executive headteacher, other leaders, site staff and teachers have all played their part in contributing to the improvements being made.

Senior and middle leaders work much more effectively as a team and are quite clear about what you, the executive headteacher and governors expect of them. Teachers receive much better quality support and challenge to improve their teaching and pupils understand that more is expected of them than in the past. Most parents have also responded very positively to the newly established lines of communication where the school is encouraging much greater understanding of their children's achievements. The action taken since the last monitoring visit demonstrates that your improvement plans are having a positive impact in guiding improvement.

Following the review of the impact of pupil premium funding you have taken effective action to meet the needs of this group of pupils. Clear lines of responsibility have been established and teachers are expected to know and be able to meet the needs of these pupils. Currently you track the progress of this group, matching against non-pupil premium pupils within the academy. In order to narrow the gap further, it would be advisable to compare the achievement of pupil premium pupils with non-pupil premium pupils nationally. Disadvantaged pupils enter Year 7 with achievement levels that are approximately one year behind those of others. It is critical that academy leaders pay close attention to this to ensure that the gap does not continue to widen.

Governors have learnt from past experience. They demonstrate a much greater strategic understanding of their responsibility for improvement. Governors have high expectations for the future of the academy. This is based on a sound knowledge of the quality of teaching and the achievement of different groups of pupils. Both you and the executive headteacher receive good-quality challenge and support from governors. Governors have also demonstrated that when necessary they can take decisive action to improve leadership.

Teaching in mathematics, modern foreign languages and science is much better than at the time of the last visit. This is in part because of the better quality of leadership in all three subjects. In mathematics lessons, pupils benefit from precise help and guidance on the next steps in their learning. The proportion of pupils making the

expected progress in mathematics increased from 40% in 2014 to 60% in 2015. However, you understand that more needs to be done to narrow the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and the others nationally so that the proportion increases further.

There is a new team teaching and leading modern foreign languages. They have made a promising start. They are developing a positive department culture and pupils were observed in lessons learning much more than at the time of the last visit. Teaching in science has strengthened, but remains inconsistent in quality. In some lessons pupils are engaged in challenging and interesting activities, such as devising experiments to investigate fuel efficiency, whereas in others, activities are more mundane and do not capture the interest of pupils as well. Pupils' presentation and the quality of the work in their books in the majority of subjects have improved as teachers pay much closer attention to this.

Behaviour in lessons is much improved. In nearly all cases, pupils worked conscientiously and respectfully.

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

External support

The relationship between this academy and Longsands Academy, the other academy in the St Neots Learning Partnership, is proving to be increasingly productive. Leadership expertise from Longsands is being exploited within the school and positive relationships across teaching departments, such as in modern foreign languages, are resulting in good practice being shared and adopted. Sensible steps to temporarily close the sixth form have resulted in Ernulf pupils accessing a much wider range of courses at the St Neots Sixth Form Centre.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire Local Authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Bristow
Her Majesty's Inspector