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Carin Taylor  
Principal  
Soham Village College  
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Soham  
Cambridgeshire  
CB7 5AA

Dear Dr Taylor

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Soham Village College**

Following my visit to your academy on 30 November 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about outcomes for disadvantaged pupils at the academy.

### **Evidence**

I met with members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders, two members of the governing body, and a group of pupils. I reviewed documents relating to the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, observed their learning in English and mathematics lessons, and carried out a scrutiny of their books across a range of subjects.

### **Context**

There are 1,315 pupils on roll. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the academy is 17%. Two and a half per cent of pupils have an education, health and care plan, and another 8% of pupils have special educational needs. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is 7%. Six teachers left the school at the end of the summer term and all have been replaced.

The academy has rightly increased its focus on the achievement of its disadvantaged pupils over time, both compared to their non-disadvantaged peers within the academy and other pupils nationally. Many of the disadvantaged pupils who achieved GCSE qualifications in 2015 joined the academy with low levels of prior

attainment. Hence the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils who attained an A\* to C grade in English and mathematics in 2015 compared to their peers was wide, at 36%. Compared to other pupils nationally, the gaps in progress made by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally closed, apart from those making expected progress in English, where it remained the same as the previous year. Assessment information for current pupils across all year groups, and my scrutiny of pupils' books, supports the academy's belief that these gaps are steadily closing.

All subject areas' self-evaluation summary documentation includes information on different pupil groups, including those who are disadvantaged. Subject-area action plans feature targets and strategies for meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils. These action plans also identify appropriate ways of evaluating the success, and regular milestones for measuring progress. During the visit, leaders, managers and governors could not, however, provide separate analyses of the achievement of children who are looked after. Suitable tracking systems are in place with regular dates during the year to gather assessment information. The English, mathematics and science departments are piloting a more refined system for tracking the progress of pupils, which they feel is more useful and which provides a more consistent approach.

The subject leaders for English and mathematics have evaluated the effectiveness of support and intervention strategies and have made suitable amendments to this provision. Effective strategies have included the provision of study days for targeted pupils, teaching revision and examination skills, and prioritising the marking for disadvantaged pupils. Less successful interventions have been reviewed and removed, including a spelling, punctuation and grammar support group for Year 8 boys in English, as well as an English homework club. Information gathered from controlled English assessments indicates that current Year 11 pupils are outperforming their non-disadvantaged peers.

Teachers know who the disadvantaged pupils are in their lessons and are able to access up-to-date tracking information on their performance. They include disadvantaged pupils in lessons as much as their peers, through appropriate questioning and well-targeted learning activities.

School leaders also monitor the behaviour and attendance of disadvantaged pupils well. At the end of 2014, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who were absent was double that of their peers. Although the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improving over time, the academy is rightly concerned about the ongoing high level of persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils. The proportion of fixed term exclusions has reduced dramatically compared to the same time last year, including for those pupils who are disadvantaged. Leaders also monitor unacceptable behaviour in lessons by recording such incidents electronically. This information shows there are few recorded incidents relating to disadvantaged pupils in Years 7 to 9 and fractionally more in Key Stage 4. The number of disadvantaged pupils who were not in education, employment or training at the end of 2015 was minimal.

Scrutiny of disadvantaged pupils' work shows that work is being marked for literacy, and teachers provide helpful written guidance to help them improve. The presentation of some pupils' work is, however, untidy.

The achievement of disadvantaged pupils is reported to members of the governing body regularly and a named governor has responsibility for overseeing the achievement of this group of pupils. From this information, governors are able to identify trends, and evaluate the impact of support and intervention strategies which aim to improve outcomes for these pupils. Governors were unable to comment on the progress made specifically by children who are looked after.

### **External support**

The academy brokers regular support from consultants as well as seeking support from the Anglian Gateway Teaching School Alliance. The academy carried out an internal review of the impact of pupil premium funding with support from a local school. The academy's school-to-school review programme also focused on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. The Regional Schools' Commissioner has also very recently set up an academy improvement board which has met once, and has wisely identified the achievement of disadvantaged pupils as a key focus area. As this is a new initiative, it is too early to evaluate its impact at this stage.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Ensure that the gaps in disadvantaged pupils' attainment and progress continue to close compared to other pupils nationally.
- Reduce the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent.
- Focus more sharply on the achievement of children who are looked after when analysing the performance of disadvantaged pupils.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire, the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Regional Schools' Commissioner. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**