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Fiona Pierson
Principal
Colchester Academy
Hawthorn Avenue
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Essex
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Dear Miss Pierson

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Colchester Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 13 October 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in July 2014. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Essex.

Yours sincerely

Chris Moodie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in July 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching across the school by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what students are capable of achieving and increasing the level of challenge in lessons, especially for the most able
 - improving students' attitudes to their learning
 - ensuring that students understand the targets that are set for them and how well they are progressing towards meeting them.

- Strengthen students' achievement, particularly in English, science and humanities by:
 - improving students' writing skills
 - ensuring a consistent and coherent approach to developing students' literacy skills
 - improving teachers' expertise in accurately assessing the standards of students' work.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - strengthening whole-school self-evaluation so the school assesses its own progress against relevant benchmarks
 - ensuring that new middle leaders can learn from already effective leaders in the academy
 - ensuring that governors have a better understanding of school achievement.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 13 October 2015

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the Principal, senior leaders, three members of the governing body and two representatives of the sponsor. Short visits were made to lessons across the academy. Students' work was scrutinised in lessons. Some of the academy's documentation was looked at, including assessment data and safeguarding records.

Context

The Principal left the school at the end of the spring term 2015. A new Principal was appointed during the summer term. There have been some changes to the structure of the senior leadership team and some senior leaders are in temporary roles. Ten teachers have left the school since the previous monitoring inspection and have been replaced by four teachers. The governing body has restructured under the new sponsor.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The new Principal has acted swiftly to set out a clear improvement plan that prioritises the right things. Improving teaching and raising achievement in all areas are at the heart of the academy's plans and there are signs of early impact. For example, a fresh approach to promoting reading is in place, starting with an intense programme of reading support for all new Year 7 students. In addition, the 'drop everything and read' initiative which involves all staff and students is proving popular.

The academy has made progress in the way that it checks on students' progress. Each student in Year 11 is being very closely monitored as they get nearer to their examinations next year. The academy has plans to roll out this approach to other year groups, but this has yet to start. In addition, the academy has introduced a new way of assessing Key Stage 3 outcomes in response to the national removal of National Curriculum levels. The new system is well organised and straightforward. It is at a very early stage of implementation.

Leaders are checking on the quality of teaching through 'drop-ins' to lessons and formal lesson observations. However, these strategies are not providing enough information about what teaching is typically like when leaders are not present. More work is needed on this so that the academy can target its support more effectively to those teachers who most need it.

The governing body has met only once in its new format, with several new members. Representatives of the sponsor attended this meeting to outline its support plan for the academy and to establish lines of communication with

governors. Governors are receiving clear and appropriately detailed information about the academy's work and the progress that it is making. Roles and responsibilities have been determined for individual governors, who are beginning to monitor their designated areas. The governors, along with the Principal, check that the academy's safeguarding procedures and records meet requirements.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- student outcomes in Year 11 were significantly better in several subjects than in previous years, demonstrating the academy's capacity to raise the quality of teaching and students' achievement
- teaching in some subjects which were previously underperforming, especially modern foreign languages, is improving
- the academy is making better use of Key Stage 2 data when students move from primary school.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The quality of teaching is inconsistent. Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of students with regard to their behaviour and rate of work, especially when they are undertaking independent activities.

External support

The sponsor is providing valuable support for the academy. An executive headteacher is supporting the leadership team on a regular basis. Other sponsor representatives are also providing support with the improvement of teaching. In addition, the academy has received administrative support and guidance with regard to aspects such as human resources and financial management. The sponsor commissioned a substantial review of the school's work recently, and is in the process of producing a report for the governing body and senior leaders of both the academy and the sponsor.