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Mr Keith Binks
Headteacher
Sir Thomas Wharton Community College A Co-operative Academy
Tait Avenue
Doncaster
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Dear Mr Binks

**Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Sir Thomas Wharton
Community College A Co-operative Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 24 September 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in January 2015. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

Following the judgement in the first monitoring inspection, leaders have now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the academy's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

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 Doncaster. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Chris Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2015

- Rapidly improve the achievement of all groups of students and the quality of teaching so both are consistently good or better, by making sure that:
 - there are high expectations of what all students can achieve
 - work set matches the needs and abilities of all groups of students, particularly for those who are disadvantaged, those with disabilities and those with special educational needs
 - students' understanding of what they are learning is checked meticulously through skilful questioning
 - clear subject guidance is given when marking students' work so they know what to do to improve
 - students act on the advice given in marking to improve their progress and develop their attitudes to learning
 - students' behaviour is managed consistently well in the classroom
 - reading, writing and mathematical skills are developed effectively across the academy
 - extra support for students is managed more effectively to ensure that students make good progress.

- Improve the impact of leaders, managers and governors by acting swiftly to ensure that:
 - they rapidly improve the quality of teaching and achievement in underperforming subjects so these subjects are consistently good or better and there is no inadequate teaching in the academy
 - all subject leaders consistently and rigorously check the quality of teaching and students' learning in order to make sure that students are making at least good progress
 - planned actions, including in subject leaders' plans, are checked regularly against clear targets that relate to students' progress, in order to determine how well the actions are contributing to improvements in teaching and learning
 - the additional government funding to support disadvantaged students is used effectively to raise 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 second monitoring inspection on 24 September 2015

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, staff responsible for supporting students that enter the academy with lower levels of attainment, a group of year 7 and 8 students and a group of governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. The inspector made a number of visits to lessons to observe teaching and students' behaviour and attitudes to learning. In addition, the inspector scrutinised the single central record, assessment information, details of checks made by senior leaders on the quality of teaching and minutes of governing body meetings.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, 12 teachers and 16 members of support staff have left the academy. There have been a number of new teachers appointed, of which five are newly qualified teachers. Efforts to appoint a second deputy headteacher were unsuccessful and a decision has been taken not to appoint to this post at present. An external consultant continues to provide support for one day each fortnight. The school has implemented a new timetable from September 2015, which has increased the length of the school day and created more teaching time, particularly for English and mathematics.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Since the previous monitoring inspection the pace of change has accelerated. Leaders have created more time for staff training and have provided clear written guidance, in the form of 'non-negotiables', that set out what they require. This guidance has been embraced by members of staff and has begun to raise their expectations and that of the students. In addition, leaders have demonstrated greater ambition by setting higher targets for student achievement, including for the current Year 11. Each department in the academy has reviewed its curriculum planning and produced new plans in line with these expectations. Teachers now expect more of students and the 'bar has been raised'. Leaders have also set higher expectations for the attainment and progress of disadvantaged students. Indeed, disadvantaged students are now expected to make more progress than other students in the academy so that the gap between their attainment and that of other students narrows.

The headteacher has taken appropriate steps to address weaknesses that were evident in the academy's plans for improvement last April. The academy's new plans for improvement contain detailed actions that will be taken across this year to sustain and embed improvements. These plans set an appropriate timescale, include sharp success measures and make clear who is accountable for delivering improvements. The arrangements to check on the impact of planned actions at

departmental and whole school level are now much more systematic. Senior leaders now meet with middle leaders every week and hold them accountable. Governors meet more frequently with the headteacher and other leaders to hold them accountable for improvements in the quality of teaching and for students' achievement. The minutes of these meetings show governors are becoming more challenging and their questions are becoming more forthright.

The governors, leaders and staff were disappointed by the 2015 GCSE examination results, which show only a modest improvement on the previous year. The results were below the targets the academy had set and below the outcomes predicted by senior leaders. This was because assessments in some subjects proved to be insecure and because efforts to help Year 11 students catch up and fill gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding were ineffective. Consequently, the proportion of students that made expected progress in English and mathematics remained well below the 2014 national averages, and far too few students made more than expected progress. Outcomes across other subjects also remained variable. However, assessment information from Years 7, 8 and 9 showed some modest signs of improvement.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, external partners and academy leaders have made further checks on the quality of teaching. These checks show the quality of teaching has begun to improve, although there is still too much teaching that requires improvement. Because checks are now more frequent and more rigorous, leaders have an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching across the academy. Training for teachers is becoming increasingly tailored to meet identified needs and is now more intensive for those teachers who are not yet performing well enough. Performance management systems are being used effectively to recognise and reward good teaching. The increased expectations of leaders have resulted in a number of teachers leaving the academy and any remaining inadequate teaching is being rapidly addressed.

Teachers' lesson planning is now much more thorough and consistent. Their plans make effective use of information on students' prior attainment and include, where necessary, activities designed to meet the needs of different abilities. Teachers include key questions in their planning and are increasingly effective at using questioning during lessons to check students' grasp of new learning. Teachers also have begun to target their questions more skilfully, ensuring that disadvantaged students are drawn into the learning at every opportunity. Teachers mark books regularly and ensure that students get time to read and respond to their comments. Students in Years 7 and 8 told the inspector they value the marking they receive as it is helping them to improve their work.

Middle leaders feel increasingly empowered to tackle areas of underperformance because they know they have the backing of senior leaders and governors. They are becoming more effective at checking the quality of provision and identifying what needs to improve. Levels of morale are rising as they can see the benefit of the work

they have done to revise planning, improve marking and to narrow gaps in attainment between different groups of students.

Strengths in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders have raised the expectations of staff and students since the previous monitoring visit. Clear guidance for what is expected of staff has been issued. Targets for students' achievement have been raised and there is a greater focus on narrowing attainment gaps between different groups of students.
- Inadequate teaching is being systematically challenged and eradicated. Support programmes for weaker teachers are increasingly intensive and effective.
- More frequent training of teachers is having a positive impact on their practice. Lessons observed during this visit showed teachers using effective questioning strategies and scrutiny of students' books showed good practice in marking. Teachers have begun to challenge poor presentation and expect better grammar, punctuation and spelling. As a result, students now regularly respond to teachers' comments and have begun to take more pride in their work.
- Leaders have made effective use of external support. As a result, the skills of senior and middle leaders are developing. Their evaluations of the quality of provision are increasingly accurate and realistic. This is providing a more robust basis upon which to plan for improvement.
- From September, students' progress in each subject is being checked more regularly, which should ensure that slower than expected progress by any student is identified earlier.
- Leaders have introduced a new timetable so that students receive more teaching, particularly in the core areas of English and mathematics, where achievement has been low in the past. Although the impact of these changes is yet to be seen, the changes provide room for students to make more rapid progress in key subjects. Longer lessons in many subjects provide the opportunity for students to study new content in more depth.
- Consistent approaches to managing behaviour are ensuring that students conduct themselves well and feel safe. Students look smart and the academy is calm and orderly.

Weaknesses in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- The additional support provided for students who have gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding has been ineffective. Last year, this support was provided too late to make a difference for students approaching

GCSE examinations and too many students chose not to attend extra sessions offered by the academy. Leaders must now act quickly to ensure that regular assessments quickly identify students with gaps in their knowledge and understanding and that additional support is provided as an entitlement, integrated into the academy day, across the whole year.

- The arrangements to help students who enter the academy with lower levels of attainment have not been effective. However, leaders have established better plans for the use of the Year 7 catch-up funding and the pupil premium funding the academy receives. From September, lower-attaining students will receive additional teaching in English and mathematics, delivered in smaller classes, with more individual support from learning support assistants. An additional lesson each week will help students develop specific literacy skills and reinforce the importance of good grammar, punctuation and spelling. New programmes are being introduced to support reading skills and the library is being developed to provide a more suitable environment to help lower-attaining students to catch up. Senior leaders must ensure that the impact of these different approaches is carefully evaluated and shared on the academy's website, so that parents can be assured the academy is providing good value for money.
- Although the evaluation skills of senior leaders are improving, they have, to date, focused on checking whether teachers comply with academy policies on teaching, marking and assessment. Senior leaders now need to focus their checks more on the impact teaching has on students' progress.

External support

The external support provided to the academy has been of a high quality. This support has helped to raise expectations and accelerate the pace of change. Staff from Hungerhill School, a local academy, have worked closely with their counterparts in the academy to develop their leadership skills. Subject leaders of English and mathematics have rewritten curriculum plans and 'raised the bar' following visits they made to Hilltop Primary School.

Senior leaders and governors have recognised the value of strong partnership working and have begun to explore how the academy might secure closer and more formal partnership links with other academies.