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Mr Dino Di Salvo
Acting Principal
Kettering Buccleuch Academy
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Dear Mr Di Salvo

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kettering Buccleuch Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 24 June 2016, 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 December 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- develop target-setting procedures further so that pupils are clear on what they need to do to make progress in every subject they study
- accelerate the rate at which improvements are made in the quality of teaching and learning, especially in the primary phase and the early years.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the interim chair of the governing body and two other governors, two representatives of the sponsor, the deputy principal with responsibility for the curriculum, the director of data, the assistant principal with responsibility for assessment and reporting and the acting headteacher of the primary phase. I also met with pupils from Year 1 to Year 10. I toured the school accompanied by you and the acting director of the primary phase. I held informal conversations with pupils and staff at different times during the inspection. I visited an enrichment event taking place at lunchtime. I reviewed the single central record.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been some changes to the leadership team and a new structure has been formulated for September. You were appointed acting principal at Easter 2016 after the principal left the school. You have appointed a deputy headteacher for the primary phase. You have revised the roles and responsibilities across the leadership team to appropriately have an increased focus on outcomes for pupils.

Ten members of staff will be leaving the school at the end of this academic year. The school will be fully staffed in September 2016.

Main findings

You have acted decisively to address the improvements needed in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school since the last inspection. You have overseen the development of systems for monitoring, data-tracking and assessment that have led to greater consistency of practice across the school and greater appreciation of staff about what is expected of them.

All senior leaders are involved in a structured monitoring cycle as well as routinely dropping into lessons. Leaders' evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning have a clear emphasis on areas for improvement and take into account achievement information and work in pupils' books. Your use of an app enables the findings of all lesson observations to be meticulously recorded, providing readily accessible information for leaders. They use this helpfully to review ways in which individual teachers have improved their teaching and what are the key areas teachers need to focus on.

Leaders' expectations are helpfully and comprehensively presented in your teaching and learning handbooks. The school's policies were place at the time of the last inspection; the application of these, and strategies clearly detailed in them, is increasingly evident in lessons across both primary and secondary phases. Examples

include the use of the assessment policy and routine incorporation of challenge into teachers' planning through the 'key', 'boost' and 'aspire' key performance indicators (KPIs).

Pupils report on the value of regular learning conversations they have with their teachers in lessons, as indicated with stickers in their books, followed by their responses, to help them know how to improve their work towards meeting their targets.

Pupils I met with during my visit were familiar with the use of KPIs and how these informed their targets. However, pupils are sometimes vague about their targets in some subjects and leaders acknowledge that a next step is to ensure that formative assessments are more routinely applied to KPIs across all subjects and year groups, to more explicitly express what pupils need to do in order to make progress.

The tracking system has been refined and extended to ensure that the analysis of pupil progress is regular and enables underachievement to be identified and acted upon swiftly. This is used effectively across the school, including in the primary phase. Teachers are growing in confidence in applying achievement information to their planning so that pupils receive the right levels of challenge and support. The most able pupils relish the challenge of 'aspire' tasks and if they find these too easy they appreciate that there are usually 'hot' tasks or 'aspire plus' activities to try next. In some cases, especially in primary, pupils associate further challenge with completing work intended for higher year groups. Leaders recognise that while teachers' questioning skills are developing, they need to grow in confidence in the application of the curriculum to deepen pupils' thinking and reasoning, especially in the primary phase.

Leaders use well their analysis of achievement information and monitoring records to inform and help them implement actions to meet the training needs of an individual or department, or at whole school level, drawing upon good practice within the school and across the trust wherever possible.

You are ensuring that key aspects of school life are being applied to the priority of improving outcomes for all pupils. The house system, with its success in improving pupils' behaviour and nurturing skills of collaboration, loyalty and team spirit, is being more directly applied to academic achievement. Heads of house are taking on more responsibility for the tracking of progress and effectiveness of interventions as well as pastoral duties. Pupils report how they have additional motivation to do well, with house points being awarded for good reports.

Leaders have boosted substantially the opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills in lessons. You have organised suitable training for staff so that they are confident about ways they can help pupils to improve their grammar, punctuation and spelling in all subjects. The impact of this training is evident

through helpful resources provided for pupils. These act as, for example, reminders of the correct use of grammar and punctuation, or as reference material to help them check their work and promote the use of technical vocabulary. Pupils in the primary phase describe how weekly tests help them to get better at spelling.

Governors have reflected wisely on the outcome of the last inspection. Some changes to the structure of the local governing body, including increasing the number of members, are enabling governors to recruit appropriately to fill any gaps in the governing body's expertise. They are supported well by the sponsor, and are increasingly able to fulfil their roles and responsibilities. Under the valuable leadership of the interim chair of the local governing body, a representative of the sponsor, governors are ensuring that they receive the necessary training to carry out their duties and be involved in monitoring activities from a more informed background.

You are working on the development plan for the forthcoming academic year. It is in draft form, pending continued work on this in an upcoming training day. This is intended to involve all of the governing body directly, in order to agree and record their monitoring responsibilities, further strengthening the position of governors to hold leaders to account for the progress made in addressing areas for improvement. In its current form, the development plan focuses on key priorities appropriately, with clear processes for monitoring and evaluation and regular milestones.

Leaders, governors and the sponsor are realistic about priority areas for continued improvement for the forthcoming academic year. For example, their monitoring visits identify improvements to be made urgently to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, in the primary phase and especially in the early years. Leaders follow up promptly their visits to lessons, with clear expectations that their feedback will be acted upon swiftly by teachers. This has led to some improvements and leaders have rightly put in place intensive levels of support to ensure that this trend continues.

The single central record shows that leaders ensure that all required safeguarding checks are made.

External support

The school is supported well by the sponsor, with valuable leadership development and support for the acting principal, and governors, as well as with guidance on key areas of responsibility such as data-handling for senior and middle leaders.

You have commissioned helpful support from an external adviser and through the local teaching alliance.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Carter-Fraser
Her Majesty's Inspector