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Mrs M Boyle
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Boyle

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to the Knole Academy

Following my visit to your school on 3 November 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 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 recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school. The school should take further action to:

- improve how teachers use the school's policy on presentation so that pupils are clear about how they set out their work in all subjects
- increase the progress that disadvantaged pupils make in mathematics so that they achieve as well other pupils nationally.

Evidence

During the inspection meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, subject leaders and members of the governing body to discuss actions taken since the last inspection. The academy action plan was evaluated and information about pupils' achievements was scrutinised, particularly the performance of boys, the most able and pupils who receive additional funding. Other documents, including minutes from governors' meetings, lesson plans and examples of strategies to support disadvantaged pupils, were also examined. We visited classrooms and saw teaching and learning in a range of subjects, across three year groups where I spoke to pupils and looked at their work.

Context

Since the previous inspection the academy trust has appointed a special educational needs co-ordinator and new staff in science and mathematics. Therefore the academy now has a full complement of staff across all subject areas.

Main findings

You are effectively addressing the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. You and your leaders have worked well in partnership with the governors to increase the level of challenge they provide. You have also adroitly sought help from the local authority and outstanding local schools to benefit from their advice and guidance. Consequently, pupils now make more progress than in the past. In the most recent GCSE results, pupils made especially good progress in English and performance increased across a range of subjects across the school.

Senior leaders have increased the frequency and stringency of the monitoring of standards and are working more closely with leaders across the school. The development plans are effectively focused on the areas for improvement, they have robust milestones and success criteria that help governors check the impact of leaders' actions through the year. You have also usefully reviewed the timing of training to support staff development and stiffened your approach to managing the performance of staff. As a result, staff now start the academic year with the right skills and teaching techniques to meet the challenging standards you have set.

Governors are very supportive of the academy and have made good use of the advice they have received to improve their work. They have revised how they use their meeting time and now scrutinise the work of senior leaders more frequently and rigorously. Governors have received valuable training, including on the changes to national assessment, and they are making better use of the time they spend in school. Consequently, governors are challenging academy leaders more thoroughly and systematically than previously. The academy sponsors have also increased the range of support offered so that more of your pupils benefit from additional opportunities to learn in different contexts and staff, especially in science, are well supported with specialist training.

The assessment system, which was new in September 2015, is now established across the academy. Teachers are using the academy's assessment policy more effectively, and are now following its guidance on the frequency and regularity of marking. Teachers also use the system to plan for pupils in their classes, including those pupils who are most-able. Consequently, pupils across both key stages know how well they are doing and make use of the advice and guidance given. However, not all teachers are clear about the school's policy on improving presentation so that some pupils' work is not set out as well as it could be.

The achievement of disadvantaged pupils is improving, although the differences between these pupils' progress and that of other pupils nationally is still wide,

especially in mathematics. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has also increased significantly over the last year, so that most of these pupils are now attending as well as other pupils. Leaders have improved the quality and rigour of their support for these pupils by using expertise from the local authority review and advice from a local outstanding school. Consequently, the support for pupils who need extra help is more effective than in the past, so that current information shows that these pupils are on track to make more progress than previously, although there is still much more to do to ensure that they make as strong progress as other pupils in the school, especially in mathematics.

The most able pupils are increasingly doing well. The bespoke training for staff, the changes to the curriculum and the 'grammar stream' are now ensuring that these pupils learn more effectively than previously. Leaders have also adroitly prioritised this group by frequently checking on the progress of the most able in lessons. As a result, the achievement information for the current cohort of Year 11 pupils suggests that these pupils are making the same rates of progress as other groups.

The gap between the achievement of boys and girls is also narrowing. Teachers are increasingly well equipped with strategies to engage and motivate boys. Leaders have changed the way they organise the timetable and ensured that the most able boys are in the right groups. In addition, leaders have reviewed the topics and texts taught so that there is a better balance between subjects that are of interest to both genders. Therefore, current information shows that there is very little difference in the progress of boys compared to girls and this is especially the case in key stage 3.

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 academy has sought a wide range of appropriate and well-timed support. This includes support for leaders, especially in mathematics, from a senior leader of an outstanding school. There have also been regular visits by lead practitioners from the sponsor school to support science. Reviews into the quality of support for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities, the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and governance have been completed. As a result, leaders are now able to address these areas more effectively and current progress and attainment information shows marked improvement compared to 2015.

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

Yours sincerely

Seamus Murphy
Her Majesty's Inspector