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Louise Miller-Marshall
Principal
Pilton Community College
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Dear Ms Miller-Marshall

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Pilton Community College

Following my visit to your school on 14 November 2017, 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 October 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and the trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the school's new mathematics curriculum is delivered consistently across all classes
- ensure that the better understanding that teachers and leaders now have of the demands of the new reformed GCSEs results in rapidly improved progress at key stage 4.

Evidence

During the inspection, I had meetings with you, other senior leaders, the vice-chair of the governing body, the chief executive officer of the trust and two of the trust's

directors of school improvement, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. In addition, I met with middle leaders and the designated safeguarding lead and her deputy. Together with you, I visited lessons where I looked at pupils' work and talked to them about it. I undertook additional work scrutiny alongside you, senior leaders and middle leaders.

Context

At the time of the previous inspection, the school had very recently joined the Primary Academies Trust, a multi-academy trust in North Devon. Since then, this trust has changed its name to Ventrus. It currently consists of 11 primary schools and Pilton Community College, which is the only secondary school in the trust. Since the previous inspection, a new assistant principal has joined the senior leadership team. You have recently given notice that you will leave your post as principal at the end of the spring term.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, the trust has taken effective steps to strengthen the quality of governance. The terms of the multi-academy trust's scheme of delegation mean that the local governing body is now able to focus more sharply on teaching, learning and assessment, with most other matters reserved to the board of trustees. In addition, the chief executive officer is currently a member of the local governing body, which ensures that the trust has a clear understanding of the operation of the governing body. A new chair of governors has taken up his role since the previous inspection. He is supported by the former chair of governors, who now acts as vice-chair.

The roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team have been restructured. The new assistant principal in charge of teaching and learning, together with other senior and middle leaders, is developing a new culture in the school, based around an open dialogue about teaching. Teacher training and development have sharpened the focus on identifying and using skills already in the school. This is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. New tracking systems and the benchmarking of assessment information with other schools have improved the accuracy and rigour of assessment.

Leaders have appointed a number of non-teaching house mentors. These full-time members of staff monitor pupils' progress with precision and, should further support be required, are able to intervene at an earlier stage than was previously possible.

Leaders, governors and the trust recognise that the school's results in 2017 were disappointing, which confirms the concerns raised about outcomes at the inspection in October 2016. There is clearly a legacy of inconsistent teaching in the past for some older pupils. Nonetheless, the work of current pupils in the school shows signs of improvement, including for the most able and for disadvantaged pupils. For

example, the most able pupils in English in Year 11 produce sophisticated and well-written analyses of the texts they are studying.

Inspectors at the previous section 5 inspection recommended that the school undertake a review of the way it uses the pupil premium. Leaders did this quickly in January 2017 and have carried out two more reviews since then, most recently in October 2017. Leaders have reflected on the poor outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in 2017 and made significant changes to the way these pupils are being helped. Work in books indicates that the changes are beginning to have some impact. In addition, school leaders remain committed to expanding the cultural horizons of disadvantaged pupils through enriching activities such as trips abroad.

The mathematics curriculum is better organised than it was. There is now less risk of repeating work that pupils had done in primary school, a problem identified at the previous inspection. In both mathematics and English, work with local primaries, within and outside the multi-academy trust, ensures that the transition between key stage 2 and key stage 3 is smoother. As a result, pupils' learning in key stage 3 is built on what they already know, understand and can do.

External support

In addition to internal support from the multi-academy trust, the school has worked with a specialist mathematics free school on training for teachers and improving the level of challenge for the most able key stage 4 pupils. It has also had support from a local outstanding school and a teaching school alliance. The school has engaged and acted upon external support in the form of a number of pupil premium reviews, as noted, and also works collaboratively with other local schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Lee

Her Majesty's Inspector