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Mr Alex Burnham  
Interim Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Burnham

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to John Smeaton Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 7 December 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 December 2016. 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 for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- continue to reduce exclusions and improve attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities
- strengthen governance further by ensuring that the governing body challenges leaders more effectively about reducing exclusions and improving the attendance of vulnerable groups
- increase teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve by increasing the level

of challenge in lessons so that pupils develop resilience in learning and make faster progress

- ensure that all middle leaders continue to foster consistency of standards so that the quality of teaching continues to improve.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and members of the senior and middle leadership team. I met with the regional director from the United Learning Trust. I also met with the chief executive officer from the Rodillian Multi-Academy Trust to discuss the impact of support received by the school. I examined a range of documents, including the school development plan, the school's self-evaluation, assessment information, governors' minutes, and exclusion and attendance records. I visited lessons with you and the deputy headteacher responsible for teaching and learning. I also scrutinised a sample of pupils' work with the deputy headteacher responsible for teaching and learning. I talked to a group of pupils from Years 9 and 11.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection there has been a period of staff redundancy and restructure. You have restructured the senior leadership team, including the appointment of a new deputy headteacher with responsibility for teaching, learning and assessment, and a new deputy headteacher with responsibility for pupils' personal development and well-being. You have appointed 11 new members of staff, including a new head of English and two new joint heads of mathematics.

## **Main findings**

Since the previous inspection, you have established more effective systems to enable leaders to carry out better checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Middle leaders are now increasingly accountable for the progress of pupils and the quality of provision in their subject areas. Improved tracking of pupils' progress means that staff more quickly identify pupils at risk of underachieving. This is leading to more individualised support for pupils. Middle leaders are clear about the impact of actions taken to improve the school since the previous inspection. They also understand the main priorities for further improvement. Both middle and senior leaders are committed to ensuring that the school improves further so that all pupils make good progress. However, senior leaders acknowledge that there is still work to do to ensure consistency of standards across all department so that the quality of teaching continues to improve.

Provisional results for 2017 indicate that Year 11 pupils made average progress from their different starting points. However, the progress of disadvantaged pupils and middle and high prior-attaining pupils improved. In the sixth form, the average

A-level grade improved from a grade D in 2016 to a grade C in 2017. The average grade on vocational courses improved from a distinction to a distinction star minus. Retention rates have also improved on A-level courses. Despite these improvements, leaders recognise that there is still work to do to increase student retention rates on vocational courses. A higher proportion of students are going to university compared to previous years. This is because expectations and aspirations in the sixth form have been raised. As a result, students are making better progress across a wider range of subjects. Nevertheless, leaders have plans in place to improve outcomes for sixth-form students in subjects such as chemistry and mathematics.

Attendance has improved, and the number of pupils who are persistently absent has declined. Despite this, leaders and governors acknowledge that there is still work to do to ensure that rates of persistent absence improve so that they are better than national average. The number of exclusions and repeat exclusions have also declined. Nonetheless, a main priority in the school development plan is to reduce exclusions more rapidly, in particular, for pupils who have SEN. A review of provision for pupils who have SEN has recently been carried out by the Rodillian Multi-Academy Trust. However, it is too early to judge the impact of the recommendations from this review.

Teaching is showing signs of improvement. There is a more positive climate for learning due to improved behaviour. Pupils talk positively about improvements in behaviour since the previous inspection. However, pupils did express that the 'positive discipline' system is not consistently applied by all teachers. Pupils appreciate the increasing opportunities to improve their work. They told me that this allows them to learn from their mistakes. However, despite improvements in the quality of teaching, sometimes teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. Consequently, opportunities to build pupils' resilience can be missed. Leaders and governors acknowledge that this is a main priority for the school moving forward.

An area for improvement identified in the previous inspection was to ensure that homework is used effectively to consolidate learning. Pupils in Year 11 told me that the quality of homework set by staff has improved. This is because pupils are given a wider range of homework opportunities. However, pupils in Year 9 expressed that the quality of homework is variable and often involves finishing off class work. Leaders acknowledge that there is still work to do to improve the quality of homework in key stage 3.

Scrutiny of pupils' work shows that the standard of presentation has improved. However, this is not consistent. There is still variability within subjects. For example, in science presentation in some classes is weaker than others. Pupils correct their spelling mistakes more frequently. They are also given more opportunities to write longer pieces of work in order to develop their extended writing skills. However, the new strategy to improve punctuation and grammar is in its infancy and therefore it

is too soon to evaluate the impact of this.

At the previous inspection, it was recommended that an external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken. Although this has not yet taken place, a review has been scheduled. However, more robust plans are in place to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. These plans are reviewed regularly to measure the impact of planned actions on disadvantaged pupils' progress. Teachers understand better the barriers to learning faced by disadvantaged pupils. As a result, teachers target support more effectively. Pupils benefit from additional lessons at the end of the school day where they receive extra help with homework and subject support. The school's current assessment information shows that differences in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are diminishing. However, leaders acknowledge that there is still work to do to ensure that differences diminish at a faster rate.

The governing body is clear about the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The appointment of new governors has increased the governing body's levels of expertise. Although governors recognise that they have not challenged leaders enough in the past, evidence in recent governing body minutes show that governors now provide more effective challenge. However, governors do accept that they need to drill down more into attendance and exclusion information so that attendance improves more rapidly and exclusions are reduced further, especially for vulnerable groups.

### **External support**

The United Learning Trust provides effective support for the school. The trust routinely conducts whole-school reviews. It also supports the development of the school's middle leadership team in subject areas where pupils are underachieving. Review reports are comprehensive and outline clear recommendations for improvement. As a result of this support, middle leaders are further developing their skills and expertise. United Learning has brokered support from the Rodillian Multi-Academy Trust. This has led to effective leadership support at both senior and middle leadership level. This is helping to drive improvement across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Michele Costello  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**