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Mr James Bowkett
Principal
Kettering Buccleuch Academy
Weekley Glebe Road
Kettering
NN16 9NS

Dear Mr Bowkett

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Kettering Buccleuch Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 18–19 March 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 June 2014. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The sponsor's statement of action 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 Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

David Rzeznik
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise achievement across the primary and secondary phases, particularly at Key Stage 2 and in mathematics by:
 - increasing the level of challenge for pupils, especially the most-able and pupils eligible for the pupil premium, across all subjects
 - improving the support given by teaching assistants to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs in lessons
 - making sure that teachers mark work regularly, give clear advice on what pupils need to do to improve their work ensuring that pupils are given help to develop their communication skills across all subjects, particularly in reading and writing, and to improve the presentation of their written work.

- Ensure that the behaviour of a minority of pupils does not adversely affect pupils' learning, particularly in mathematics and science.

- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that new heads of subjects receive the training and support they need to drive improvement so that teaching is never less than good
 - implementing plans to ensure that all pupils follow courses which are appropriate for their ability levels
 - making sure that leaders and governors measure the impact of the spending of additional funding to ensure accelerated progress for all pupils supported by the pupil premium
 - ensuring that the local governing body continues to work with experts from the sponsor to develop their skills and understanding of their role so that they are equipped to take more rapid action to address areas of persistent underperformance.

- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved. An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 18–19 March 2015

Evidence

Inspectors met with the Principal, Assistant Principal, Deputy Principals, Director of Achievement, Director of Inclusion, Directors of Learning and Business, Head of Primary, Acting Deputy Head of Primary, Head of Mathematics, Director of Literacy and Head of English, Head of Sixth Form, Heads and Assistant Heads of Houses, the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors, the sponsor's Directors for Primary and Secondary Education, the Business Services Director and the person with responsibility for maintaining the single central register.

Inspectors observed teaching and learning in primary, secondary and sixth form classes. All of the observations were conducted with senior leaders. A sample of work in English and mathematics, from Years 2, 6, 9 and 11, was scrutinised jointly with Deputy Principals, to check how well pupils are learning and if marking identifies what must be improved. Work in books in other years was checked informally. Primary and secondary pupils were interviewed to seek their views about academy life. Interviews were held with senior and subject leaders, governors and sponsor representatives to evaluate the extent of improvement in addressing the serious weaknesses identified in June 2014. A range of documentation was evaluated, including the revised academy improvement plan, the sponsor's statement of action, local governing body and Academy Improvement Board minutes, performance data, monitoring of teaching records, and reports of visits conducted by external consultants.

Context

A new Head of Primary, two Directors of Literacy, three teachers, a new site manager, four teaching assistants and a Primary House Officer have been appointed since the first monitoring visit in October 2014.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

The Principal, senior leaders, governors and the sponsor are driving improvement quickly. Serious weaknesses in teaching, learning and leadership are being addressed very effectively. There has been an uncompromising and successful drive to improve all aspects of the academy's work. Pupils are right when they say that the quality of education has improved dramatically since June 2014.

Leaders at all levels, governors and the sponsor are creating a culture of high expectations that is improving standards, speeding up all pupils' progress, particularly in English and mathematics, and raising pupils' aspirations. There has been a relentless focus on addressing the underperformance of leaders and teachers. The setting of targets to improve teachers' performance is rigorous. Teachers, leaders and subject departments that are not performing well enough

receive good quality coaching, support and guidance to help them improve. Capability procedures are used when necessary to remove staff if their performance continues to be inadequate.

New heads of subjects are effectively inducted into academy life. They are making a good contribution to raising standards and improving teaching. New leaders have settled quickly and are giving of their best. They receive good training and support so that they can fulfil their roles and responsibilities effectively. High-quality English and mathematics leaders have been recruited and they are teaching very well. They are excellent role models for teachers in their subject departments.

A long-standing weakness has been successfully remedied. Senior leaders have ensured the accuracy of the judgements made about attainment, through internal and external checking of standards, in every year. The information gained from assessment is used well by most teachers to ensure that work is suitably challenging for different groups of pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, more able, or have a disability or a special educational need.

Monitoring and evaluation of the academy's work are good. High priority is given to improving teaching and learning. Very effective procedures are used to identify the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning, and robust action is taken to remedy any shortcomings in teaching and to rectify gaps in learning. Bespoke training, coaching and support in the classroom have successfully eliminated inadequate teaching and led to more learning that is now good or better.

Effective action has been taken to ensure that the courses a small number of pupils follow on other sites are appropriate for their ability and aspirations. For example, Year 11 pupils are attending more advanced college courses in hair and beauty and mechanics than in June 2014. Year 10 off-site work-related courses have stopped. The academy maintains a good oversight of how well pupils are achieving and how well they are taught in off-site activities.

Leaders track pupils' attainment and progress, but their analysis of performance data is insufficiently robust and is too complicated. Consequently, there is a lack of clarity about how well different groups of pupils are achieving, particularly in English and mathematics, since September 2014 and last academic year.

The academy improvement plan was not fit for purpose in October 2014. The revised plan is of good quality and is well focused on important weaknesses. Priorities, actions, timescales, costings and the milestones to be achieved are now explicit. Monitoring arrangements make clear which senior leaders, governors, subject or sponsor leaders are evaluating the impact of the work undertaken.

Governors' effectiveness has been improved as a consequence of the two external reviews of their work in November 2014. The review of governance has led to governors holding senior leaders to account for the academy's performance more

effectively. They are taking the necessary action, in conjunction with senior leaders and the sponsor, to address the most important areas of underperformance. Governors have produced a high-quality action plan to improve their level of challenge, increase their visibility in the academy and community, and improve their communication with senior leaders. First-hand evidence shows that there is improvement in all of these areas.

Governors are now well informed about the impact additional government funding is making on disadvantaged pupils' progress. An action plan to further improve teaching and leadership support for disadvantaged pupils is in place and the actions taken so far are suitably monitored by governors and a Deputy Principal. Governors are ensuring that finances are managed effectively. They have a formal written agreement, with the sponsor, to set a deficit budget in the short-term. The agreement specifies that finances must balance within three years. The reason for the deficit is the additional costs associated with addressing the academy's serious weaknesses.

An Academy Improvement Board continues to suitably monitor the progress made on key priorities and oversees the work of the local governing body effectively.

All staff, and other adults, who have unsupervised contact with pupils have been appropriately vetted to confirm their suitability to work with children. The single central register contains all of the required information.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The quality of teaching is improving quickly, particularly in English and mathematics, and in the sixth form, because the actions leaders have taken to improve teachers' subject knowledge and the methods used to make activities more challenging are effective. Pupils' progress since September 2014 has speeded up in English and mathematics in all years. Wide variations in learning are reducing and the gap between disadvantaged pupils' performance and others is narrowing. This is because work is more demanding and stimulating, activities are better matched to pupils' capabilities, and learning is no longer disrupted. In the sixth form more care is taken to ensure pupils are on the right courses linked to their aspirations and better feedback is pinpointing what must be improved to ensure pupils achieve target grades.
- Standards are rising in English and mathematics in all years because leadership and teaching of these subjects is much better. For example, in 2014, 49% of pupils attained an A* to C GCSE grade in mathematics. Current data indicate that in 2015, 73% of pupils will attain this threshold in the subject. In 2014, 8% of disadvantaged pupils attained an A* to C GCSE grade in English and mathematics. It is predicted that 44% of disadvantaged pupils will attain this threshold in 2015. The proportion of pupils reaching age-related expectations at the end Years 2 and 6 is rising steadily in reading, writing and mathematics.

- Teaching assistants are more effectively deployed and provide better support in classrooms than in the past. Consequently, pupils who have specific learning difficulties get the guidance they need and make the progress they should in lessons.
- Heads of House are monitoring pupils' behaviour well and they ensure that the academy code of conduct is followed closely. As a result, pupils' conduct in lessons and around the academy is good. Low-level disruption is now rare in mathematics and science lessons because teachers manage pupils' behaviour well.
- Presentation of work has improved because teachers' and pupils' expectations have been raised about the quality of work produced. Pupils take more pride in their work than in the past.
- The house system is highly effective. Pupils report that being in a house provides a sense of identity. They like the family spirit and the competitive nature of activities. House and assistant house leaders' approach to learning, and the house activities provided, are successfully boosting pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem.
- In September 2015, the academy will take its full quota of Year 7 pupils for the first time. This is because its reputation has markedly improved and more parents are choosing the academy as their first choice. More sixth formers are going to university, and a much higher percentage are going to top universities, including Cambridge.

Weaknesses in the academy's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teaching is not consistently good. There are occasions when work is not challenging and gaps in learning are not always rectified rapidly. For example, the activities that the youngest children do on their own, without adult support, are not always demanding or stimulating so learning is slowed.
- Reception leadership is not pinpointing weaknesses in teaching and learning quickly; therefore, they are not addressed quickly. School data currently shows that Reception children's progress is not consistently good in all areas of learning.
- The quality of marking is inconsistent. The next steps in learning are not always identified to ensure that pupils know what must be improved. Some pupils do not act on teachers' comments and some teachers do not ensure pupils do corrections to rectify errors. Spelling, punctuation and grammatical weaknesses are not always properly addressed to improve individuals' writing skills.

External support

The sponsor is providing good support and guidance to raise standards and to improve teaching and leadership quickly. Primary and secondary Directors regularly evaluate the quality of education provided, along with external consultants who support them in this work. Strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning are identified and action plans are suitably developed to rectify shortcomings in practice. The Directors and external consultants are rigorous in ensuring that weaknesses are systematically remedied and that new initiatives to improve teaching are making the impact that they should. Appropriate action is taken if initiatives are not making a difference.

The secondary Director performs an important role as Chair of the Academy Improvement Board, which appropriately oversees the implementation of the academy improvement plan and evaluates the progress made in addressing the serious weaknesses identified in June 2014. The Academy Improvement Board also suitably monitors the effectiveness of the local governing body to ensure that it is providing the necessary level of accountability and that governors are fulfilling their statutory duties.

Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection, the sponsor has taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose.