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Mrs Helena Sullivan-Tighe
Headteacher
The Community College Whitstable
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Whitstable
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CT5 1PX

Dear Mrs Sullivan-Tighe

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Community College Whitstable

Following my visit to your school on 22 June 2015, 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 March 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. Leaders should take further action to:

- ensure that all staff employed at a senior level and those newly appointed, benefit from opportunities to learn from best practice elsewhere by linking with schools facing similar challenges in which rates of progress and achievement overall, particularly in mathematics and English are higher.

Evidence

During the inspection I met with you, other senior leaders the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. You accompanied me on a tour of the school, during which I was able to visit lessons, speak to students and staff and

observe how the school operates. In addition to discussing the actions taken since the last inspection, I also evaluated the school improvement plan and scrutinised other monitoring documentation, including a recent external review and evaluation of the impact of pupil premium funding.

Main findings

Leaders were disappointed with the outcomes of the previous section 5 inspection. At the time of the inspection they felt they had made faster progress than the inspection report acknowledged, such as in aspects of leadership and management. However, leaders now agree that the inspection process has rightly helped them to reflect and understand that despite their best efforts, they had not focused sufficiently on evaluating the impact of their activities. Since the inspection, leaders have re-grouped and are determined to learn from the experience, move forward rapidly and address effectively the identified shortcomings.

In particular, all members of the senior team are in agreement that checking and monitoring within the school lacked consistency in the past, owing to stretched capacity at a senior level. This lack of consistency has informed each of the identified actions to secure the necessary improvements noted within the section 5 inspection report.

In order to improve the progress made by disadvantaged students, the most-able and sixth form students, a range of useful strategies has been triggered. In particular, the staff training programme has sensibly focused on the need to rehearse with all staff, how to use of the school's commercially produced software system effectively to track all students' progress, especially those vulnerable to under-achievement. All staff have been re-trained. Expectations of subject leaders have also been wisely re-visited. All subject leaders are now required to account for the progress of identified students against their targets, at a six weekly meeting with their line-managers. Since providing the additional training and tightening up on expectations, senior leaders report a much increased use of the data tracking systems by staff at all levels, particularly middle leaders.

To strengthen the target setting and monitoring of sixth form provision, leaders have introduced a commercially produced system, designed specifically for schools with sixth forms. The system enables more challenging targets to be set and generates individualised student reports, enabling closer monitoring and intervention to take place, where necessary. Leaders are confident that the system will help them to identify dips in sixth form achievement and provide more effective challenge in this area. Although early signs suggest that the system is supporting students better, it is too soon to judge fully the effectiveness of this approach.

In response to the previous inspection, the headteacher and governors commissioned an immediate review of the ways in which pupil premium funding have been used over time to support the progress of disadvantaged students. Led

by an external consultant, expenditure has been fully evaluated and a helpful report has been presented to governors. The report findings and points for action have been shared with staff and are being incorporated into the school's development plan. Prior to the review, leaders correctly signalled to staff the importance of knowing these students and planning to meet their needs, through the staff training programme. This approach is already beginning to bear fruit. Recent monitoring activity in relation to students' attendance rates, behaviour and achievement, indicates that disadvantaged students who featured prominently at the time of the previous inspection, are currently far less conspicuous.

In order to strengthen their effectiveness, senior leaders have looked critically at how they organise themselves and what they expect of all staff. As in the past, leadership activity continues to involve monitoring of teaching and scrutiny of students' work. However, when they observe teaching, leaders now expect to see evidence that planned tasks and activities consistently take account of the needs of all learners, including the most able and disadvantaged students. In particular, staff know that they are expected to identify learning objectives that provide stretch and challenge, especially for the most-able students.

Training opportunities have been well-received by staff, who view this as supportive. Furthermore, leaders have wisely sought staff views, asking them to identify how senior leadership support might be put to better effect. In response to staff feedback, senior leaders have since tightened up their monitoring of students who in the past, featured repeatedly in relation to instances of low level disruption. As a result, leaders have already witnessed a significant reduction in the numbers of repeat recidivists since the time of the previous inspection.

Governors too, have begun the process of reflecting on how they can improve their effectiveness. At the time of this inspection, the Chair of the Governing Body was in the process of reviewing roles and working with other governors to put together a governors' action plan. Now that the pupil premium review is complete, governors are also considering how they can sharpen their practice in delivering their statutory duties, such as the monitoring and evaluation of expenditure and ensuring that the curriculum meets the needs of all students, including the most-able and disadvantaged students.

Governors have backed the headteacher with a re-structure of the senior leadership team and in taking necessary steps to address inadequate teaching. New staff with a strong track record of success gained elsewhere have been recruited alongside internal candidates. Roles and accountabilities have been re-visited and there is now greater clarity in relation to what each member of the senior team is accountable for and to whom. Importantly, senior leaders and governors have agreed that future self-evaluation will be informed by measurable student outcomes. They have correctly amended the school improvement plan, which now incorporates each of the shortcomings identified at the previous inspection, with sensible actions to address these effectively.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Since the previous inspection, Kent local authority has assigned a new school improvement adviser (SIA) to the school. Leaders have welcomed this move as an opportunity for a fresh pair of eyes to challenge and support them in their improvement activities. The SIA has already spent time in the school and has met with senior staff and governors. An action plan has been put together which includes a review of literacy development within the school, scheduled to take place before the end of the term. Beyond this, the local authority intends to support leaders in linking with other senior leaders of similar schools with a proven track record of success. The local authority also plans to support leaders in a review of leadership and management, including governance to enable leaders to be clearer about strengths or gaps in their skillset.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Kent and as below.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Farmer

Her Majesty's Inspector