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Mr Ian Johnson
Headteacher
Samuel King's School
Church Road
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Dear Mr Johnson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Samuel King's School, Cumbria

Following my visit to your school on 1 July 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. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- strengthen improvement planning to make it clear who will lead actions, how progress with plans will be checked and how the impact on students' achievement will be measured and evaluated
- ensure teachers know how students' literacy and numeracy skills are expected to be applied in other subjects and have the subject knowledge to do so.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held several meetings to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I met with you, the teaching team leader and the deputy

headteacher who are taking up post on 1 September, a local authority adviser and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body. I met with a group of students and spoke with many others as I visited classrooms during lessons. I scrutinised students' work in a range of subjects and looked at several documents including your improvement planning, records of Governing Body Meetings and external monitoring from the local authority, professionals from the Queen Katherine Teaching School Alliance and independent consultants.

Context

Since the last inspection, one teacher has left the school and one has returned. Two new senior leaders have been appointed and take up their posts in September 2015; a deputy headteacher who is new to the school, and a teaching team leader from within the staff. Two teachers are leaving at this end of this academic year. New teachers have been appointed to teach English and food technology.

Plans to create an extended federation with primary schools in the area are currently out for consultation.

Main findings

There have been a number of changes since you took up your post as headteacher; almost all teachers have joined the school within the last four years. The improvements referred to in the last inspection report have continued. Staff are highly motivated and determined to secure improvements quickly and you are making sure they are sustainable. Students are very positive about changes that have taken place. They say their teachers know them well do their best to meet their individual needs. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and ambitious for the students.

Your improvement plans, however, do not reflect the actions that have taken place to date. They do not currently address all the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. As you explained, detailed improvement planning has been delayed until the new senior leaders take up their posts fully, in September 2015. The leadership team is being strengthened with the new appointments and the new leaders are already working in school to lay foundations for developments. They have exciting ideas to take initiatives forward, but there are not yet clear action plans outlining precisely the responsibilities of all staff, the timeline and expected impact on students' outcomes.

You have resolved quickly the areas for improvement relating to safeguarding and behaviour. Records of staff qualifications and training are up to date. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour by students are logged in more detail and dealt with appropriately. A more detailed analysis of behaviour is planned once the deputy headteacher is in post.

Teaching continues to improve due to well-planned professional development and a concerted drive from all staff. Students and staff say there has been a real culture shift, and express a high level of confidence in you to 'get things done' and lead improvement. Students are full of praise for their teachers, saying for example, 'teachers are helping us to aim higher and achieve better'. One student showed how her English grades have improved significantly with better teaching and support that is tailored to meet her particular needs very well. The revised marking policy is having a positive impact. Students find the new approach and teachers' comments helpful. Marking is particularly effective in mathematics, where there are clear links to target grades and teachers' comments support students to correct misunderstandings or provide new challenges.

The changes you have made to curriculum planning provide students with more opportunities to study interesting and relevant subjects at GCSE and extend their options for further study on leaving school. The new GCSEs in agriculture and sports are popular and make good use of teaching expertise from outside the school. Students can now choose from a wide range of GCSE options from Year 9 onwards, including single sciences. As discussed, you and the school's governors need to continue to check the impact of early entry for GCSE closely, to make sure capable students are not prevented from reaching the higher A and A* grades. You have identified the application of literacy and mathematical skills across different subjects as a priority. There is a need to make sure all teachers know precisely what is expected and have the knowledge and skills to support this drive.

Students' attitudes to learning have improved as a result of teachers' raised expectations, a more aspirational curriculum and an atmosphere that is conducive to learning. In the lessons I visited, students were working together effectively, showing initiative and enthusiasm. Students' work in their books has improved because expectations for productivity and presentation are clearer. Students, rightly take pride in their artwork, which is impressive. Students' horizons are being broadened through visits to sixth forms and universities and increased opportunities for work experience.

All teachers have a leadership role in their subject due to the small size of the school. They are tracking students' progress more effectively using regular assessments and better systems to record them. School data show that students are making quicker progress than in the past, particularly at Key Stage 3. Gaps between boys and girls and between disadvantaged students and others in school are closing, as teaching is meeting needs better from the start. The gaps remain wider in the current Year 11, due to the legacy of less effective teaching and curriculum planning in the past.

Governors know the school's strengths and areas for further development, based on their own monitoring and moderation from professionals from the Queen Katherine Teaching Alliance. Governors have a good understanding of assessment data and

are focused on improving outcomes for students. The review of the use of pupil premium, recommended in the last inspection, is scheduled for November 2015.

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

You are drawing on external support effectively. Partnership working with Queen Katherine Teaching School Alliance enables staff to gain from working with specialist teachers and National and Local Leaders in Education. Students benefit from the arrangements to extend GCSE options with Newton Rigg College and the Carlisle Sports Partnership. You are outward-looking and keen to develop productive partnership working with primary schools in the area. The local authority 'strategic improvement meetings' check progress and provide helpful information and advice to governors and leaders.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria.

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law

Her Majesty's Inspector