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Mrs Jane Horn
Principal
Cromwell Community College
Wenny Road
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Cambridgeshire
PE16 6UU

Dear Mrs Horn

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Cromwell Community College

Following my visit to your academy on 21 January 2016, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement, identified at the recent section 5 inspection, in order to become a good school. Further action should be undertaken to:

- implement more detailed procedures to measure the impact of the different strategies used to improve pupils' outcomes using the pupil premium funding.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, a number of senior and middle leaders and the chair of the standards committee of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with a group of Year 7 and Year 8 pupils. I scrutinised documentation about the achievement and attendance of all pupils and specific analysis relating to the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. I

considered the provision for pupils who are looked after by the local authority and looked at your analysis of the use of the pupil premium funding. I visited a number of lessons with the assistant principal responsible for teaching and learning to look at provision for disadvantaged pupils. I spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at their work.

Context

Since my last visit, you have restructured the responsibilities of the heads of year. In addition, you have appointed a member of staff to lead on improving the outcomes achieved by disadvantaged pupils and a new special educational needs coordinator. Temporary cover is in place for the leadership of the sixth form.

Main findings

The strong rate of improvement recognised at my last visit has continued apace. Leaders at all levels share your ambitions for the academy to be judged to be at least good at its next inspection. Faculty leaders have risen to the challenge of pursuing the demanding and aspirational targets that senior leaders have set for all pupils. With very few exceptions, all pupils are expected to make better than expected progress. This ethos of high expectations is reflected in lessons, in pupils' attitudes to their learning, in the quality of their work and in their dress and behaviour.

The management of the pupil premium (extra government funding received to support disadvantaged pupils to achieve well) has improved significantly since the inspection in February 2015. As a result of more careful monitoring, this group of pupils are making improved progress and reaching higher standards. Information shows that in 2015, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils remained below that of other pupils. As achievement across the academy continues to improve, this gap is starting to narrow. Current checks show that both disadvantaged pupils and others are making significant improvements in the amount of progress they are making. More pupils are on track to achieve 5 A* to C grades in their GCSE examinations. Assessment information shows that the gap narrows increasingly as pupils move through the school. Although pupils' progress is carefully monitored, the impact of the different interventions and approaches used to support disadvantaged pupils is not analysed well enough to enable leaders and governors to judge which are the most effective and provide the best value for money.

The assistant principal responsible for teaching and learning has continued to develop the strong systems she has designed for monitoring teaching and its impact on pupils' progress. It is good to see that this work is also being used now to help other schools improve. Because of the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils in the school, she has incorporated checks to see how well teachers are addressing the barriers that these pupils face in their learning. In the lessons visited, teachers understood the needs of the pupils in

their classes well and were carefully questioning pupils to check on and develop their understanding. The knowledge that teachers develop of pupils' needs is used effectively to support them in lessons. It does not, however, always lead to the specific actions or extra support necessary to enable the pupils to overcome the barriers they face. For example, to help them develop better organisational skills where these are weak.

Faculty leaders contribute to, and draw on, information about the quality of teaching. They use it to develop a collegiate commitment to continual improvement in their faculty teams. As a result, staff better understand the expectations of their teaching and know what to do to improve it. Because of the resulting changes, pupils say that they benefit from the consistent and informative feedback they receive both in lessons and when teachers mark their work.

Careful thought has been given to assessing and tracking pupils' attainment and progress. The vice principal has implemented detailed systems for analysing how well pupils are doing. Procedures in place assess and track all pupils from their starting points in Year 7 towards the challenging targets set for Year 11. Regular meetings with faculty leaders are used to identify, and to try to find solutions for, any underperformance. The achievement of disadvantaged pupils is considered as part of these meetings. In addition, senior leaders meet on a fortnightly basis to discuss pupils identified as at risk of underachieving. This is to determine both in-school and external agency intervention and support that can be put in place. The inclusion team meets on a weekly basis to address wider issues likely to affect pupils' achievements, for example their attendance and their emotional needs. Pupils at risk of not being in school are very well supported to overcome the challenges that they face and are reintegrated successfully. Your highly inclusive approach means the academy regularly admits pupils who are vulnerable, or at risk of permanent exclusion, in year groups across the school, often in Years 10 and 11. While these pupils make improved progress as a result of your support, some do not have sufficient time to catch up.

Disadvantaged pupils, particularly those who are most vulnerable, also benefit from a range of other, well focused, extra support. You and other senior leaders mentor underachieving pupils in Year 11. This supports pupils to identify and overcome obstacles to their success. Older pupils support new entrants in Year 7 to manage the demands of secondary school. In addition, a programme of mentoring is being implemented for pupils at risk of underachieving in Year 9. Pupils say that this extra support makes a significant difference to their ability to be successful.

Leaders and staff work hard to ensure that pupils' transition from primary school is managed well. A significant proportion of disadvantaged pupils enter the academy with levels of attainment that are below those expected for their age. The funding used to support pupils in Year 7 to catch up has been used to help them improve their reading skills. A number of Years 7 and 8 pupils gave inspirational accounts of how the academy has helped them to re-engage in their education and make good

progress in their learning. Pupils agreed that they felt that leaders, teachers and other staff respected them, listened to them and worked hard to help them achieve. As one pupil said, 'they have stayed by my side and helped me solve my problems, they've made a massive change to my life'. Another said, 'pupils really push to repay teachers' marking; it really does help so we try hard to make sure what they ask happens. I've moved from expecting a C to a B because I'm challenged, our targets push us into wanting to go above what we expected. It means we can do more than we thought we could'.

Governors have restructured the way they work and have sought to build a governing body with an appropriate range of skills and expertise. For example, one member has a background in safeguarding. Minutes of the standards committee meetings show that governors carefully check whether leaders are on track in their work to improve the academy. Governors provide relevant challenge to leaders about the outcomes that the academy achieves. For example, in response to governors' questions about the effective use of teaching assistants, their work is now more carefully monitored. Although governors understand how well disadvantaged pupils are achieving, they do not have enough information to enable them to know which uses of the pupil premium funding are the most effective.

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 make good use of external agencies to support disadvantaged pupils. For example, leaders' effective work with the local authority teacher who provides advice and support for children who are looked after. You are also working more closely with the police to support pupils vulnerable to negative influences and declining attendance.

You seek and quickly act on the advice of external advisers, both to provide an external validation of your work and to provide ongoing challenge to accelerate the drive to be a good or better academy.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire and the Education Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Prue Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector