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Mr Kevin Holmes
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Dear Mr Holmes

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Copperfield Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 6 October 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and the trust are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- make sure that everyone understands the urgency of the required improvements and establish realistic but ambitious timeframes for getting to good
- ensure that everyone is very clear about what contribution their actions make towards rapidly improving pupils' outcomes
- be precise about exactly what needs to improve and by when, including when giving feedback to teachers.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders and two representatives of the trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I spoke informally with parents at the start of the school day. I reviewed the school improvement plan and a range of other documentation that you provided. Together, we made brief visits to a number of classes across all three key stages. During these visits, I spoke with pupils and sampled some of their work.

Context

At the time of the previous inspection, a new executive headteacher, leadership team and local governance arrangements had been in place for approximately two weeks. There have been further significant changes to governance, leadership and teaching since this time.

The executive headteacher's involvement with the school ended during the spring term, 2017. The head of school continued to run the school, supported by the trust. The current experienced headteacher took up post on 7 May 2017. The head of school left shortly after this, following a three-week handover period. At approximately the same time, the federated governing body disbanded, formally ceasing at the end of the summer term. The trust board retain the statutory governance function and work is under way to form a new local governing body. The deputy headteacher has joined the school since the previous inspection and two assistant headteachers took up post in September 2017. A new special educational needs coordinator began in June 2017, following a period when there was no dedicated coordinator in post. Eleven new teachers took up post in September 2017.

Main findings

The school is not improving quickly enough. In a period of significant turbulence in staffing and leadership, standards have fallen further in all key stages since the previous inspection, including for disadvantaged pupils. The external pupil premium review, carried out in January, identified numerous weaknesses in the school's pupil premium strategy. The use of funding to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils is still insufficiently targeted and remains weak.

Leaders' own evaluations show that the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not improving quickly enough. Time in lessons is not used well enough to help pupils catch up rapidly with previously lost ground. Hampered by staff turnover, leaders lack confidence in the consistency and accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' capabilities.

Attendance rates are falling. Too many pupils do not come to school often enough. Various strategies to reverse this trend are being explored, but the headteacher's

own analysis of current rates gives cause for serious concern due to the negative impact that poor attendance has on pupils' achievement.

Current leaders are determined to make a difference. They know the broad areas and some specific aspects of the school's work that they want to improve. The headteacher has secured the full confidence and support of his leadership team. Leaders at all levels have embarked enthusiastically with a clear strategy for how they intend to lift the quality of teaching. They are making rational decisions about what to prioritise first. Leaders have begun to provide well-considered sequences of support. For example, they may give teachers opportunities to observe best practice, time to adjust their own teaching and then offer feedback about the resulting improvements. However, leaders are not precise enough when offering support in making absolutely clear exactly what needs to improve and by when.

Some parents have noticed a positive difference made by the arrival of the new headteacher. Letters sent home to parents are now more helpful and informative about what pupils are learning in class and how this relates to the homework that they are set.

Leaders have adapted the school's improvement plan in the light of the lack of progress made during the previous academic year. The trust's new format for planning improvement is intended to bring tighter timeframes and provide sharper evaluation of the difference made by the action taken. However, some of the targets lack precision. The link between targets, actions and the intended outcomes are not always clear. The timescales in the plan do not give a clear picture of by when the trust and leaders aim to have secured a good quality of education for pupils.

The time that has been lost through continuously changing staffing and leadership to this point means that the current team is faced with a considerable task. Leaders at all levels are frank to admit that the school is not currently on track to be providing a good quality of education within the necessary timeframes.

External support

Now approaching four years since the school re-opened as an academy, by its own admission the trust has still not been successful in securing a good quality of education for pupils. The previous inspection found that the trust had an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. This continues to be the case. The new regional director and the trust have identified correctly that standards have further declined since the previous inspection. However, this candid self-evaluation is yet to lead to demonstrable improvement.

In the last year, the trust acted decisively to radically change the school's leadership and disband the federation that had been very newly formed at the time of the last inspection. This has left the school, temporarily, without a functioning local

governing body. Many senior leaders are very new to post, which means that at this stage there is little demonstrable evidence of their effectiveness. This year, the trust has begun to provide further support and make its approach to holding leaders to account more systematic. Again, it is too soon to see the difference that this may make.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Clive Dunn

Her Majesty's Inspector