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Mrs Christine McLiintock
Headteacher
John Colet Academy
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Dear Mrs McLintock

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to John Colet Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 15 May 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 January 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The academy should take immediate action to:

- urgently focus the work of the senior team on improving teaching and raising achievement; ensure that it functions as a cohesive and united team in doing so
- make sure improvement plans express in plain terms how learning and progress will get better, so that governors and other parties can clearly see if improvement is happening
- prioritise the areas arising from the inspection in improvement planning; do allow peripheral or additional matters to distract from them
- refine systems for evaluating teaching and learning so that they report clearly on students' learning and progress, particularly for under-achieving groups.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, other senior leaders, the Vice Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the academy improvement plans and I read a range of other documents, including minutes of governing body meetings and records of the evaluation of teaching. Together, we visited a range of classrooms, mainly in science, mathematics and English, talked to students about their progress, and looked at the quality of work in books. I checked the register of recruitment checks made on staff joining the academy.

Context

Since the last inspection, one member of the senior leadership team has resigned. The current structure of the team, of four assistant headteachers, is changing to include a deputy headteacher, and you expect to recruit to this post during the summer term. You have increased staffing in science for September.

Main findings

Governors have acted quickly to address the criticisms of their knowledge of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. They have commissioned and begun to act upon a review of their effectiveness. They are seeking further training and development and have requested support from the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust in this. Minutes of governing body meetings since the inspection show governors strongly testing the validity of the information they receive from you and senior leaders. They are taking a healthily sceptical view of developments until they see evidence of their impact. They have drawn up an action plan for their improvement as a governing body, as well as a timeline for how they will monitor the improvement of the academy. The governors' improvement plan is a step in the right direction, but lacks detail about what good governance will look like. Governors have scrutinised and questioned the academy's improvement plan, including asking why it includes action points for areas not arising from the inspection. I share their concern that the plan needs to focus very sharply on the inspection outcomes.

You accept the inspection findings fully. You describe the academy as having been 'too cosy' in the past and 'coasting' rather than effectively scrutinising and monitoring the achievement of all students. You have acted to address criticisms of leadership by commissioning further, in-depth reviews of the work of the senior team. These reviews are hard-hitting. They paint a picture of leadership that is dysfunctional. As a result, senior leaders have drawn up new protocols for how they conduct their meetings and carry out their responsibilities. They have a clearer understanding of how to pull together so that, as a team, they can bring about the

necessary improvements quickly. There is not yet sufficient evidence of this renewed commitment changing classroom practice, however.

Students give varied answers when asked about their achievement and progress. Some know their targets, others do not. Many are vague about what they need to do to improve their work, even though there have been efforts to ensure that teachers give better-quality feedback through marking and assessment. Some books are extensively and helpfully marked, such as in mathematics. Elsewhere, there is still evidence of marking that is patchy or inconsistent. Although a common approach to marking has been adopted, it is not yet applied consistently or well enough to help students make faster progress. The progress of some science classes continues to suffer because of changes in teacher; senior leaders have not done enough to plug gaps in students' learning because of this.

Observations of teaching are still too formulaic; they are checklist-based rather than focused on the achievement of groups. For example, although the achievement of boys is of significant concern, a review of lesson observation notes showed none with specific reference to boys' learning and achievement.

The academy's action plan is based on quantifiable measures of success, but is not clear enough about what these mean in practice. It is openly available on the academy website, but some of its aims are too full of jargon to be helpful to parents: 'establish full flight path trajectories setting new benchmarks for expected student progress' or 'create a decision tree for sending underperforming students down individual or whole school intervention paths'.

There is no lack of will on your part to embrace the challenges set by the inspection and to lead the academy to be judged 'good' in the shortest possible time. You and the governing body understand the scale of improvement necessary, but it is not yet clear if this understanding is shared or accepted widely enough throughout the school, or if senior and subject leaders understand their roles clearly enough.

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

External support

Prior to the inspection, the local authority had limited involvement in the academy. You have since actively sought the involvement of the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust. It is ready to support the drive for change; its school improvement officers are keen to offer robust evaluation of your work, but their involvement is only just underway. As a useful first step, they are brokering links with other schools where there is strong practice in areas you are seeking to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside

Her Majesty's Inspector