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Mr Simon White
Principal
John Cabot Academy
Woodside Road
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Dear Mr White

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to John Cabot Academy

Following my visit to your school on 9 June 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 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 June 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- embed recent changes to the school's new feedback policy so that all pupils understand how to improve their work
- embed recently introduced strategies that support the learning of disadvantaged pupils so that they are able to make progress in line with other pupils nationally
- further develop the process for monitoring the quality of teaching so that a greater emphasis is placed on the progress that pupils are making over time.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders, executive officers of the federation, governors and trustees to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. I made short visits to lessons with you to determine the quality of pupils' work and to talk to pupils. I also scrutinised records relating to pupil outcomes and I evaluated the school's action plans.

Context

You took up your post as principal in September 2016. The multi-academy trust, the Cabot Learning Federation, is re-organising the sixth form across its academies. This has involved reducing the number of courses on offer. The number of sites will be reduced from six to two in September 2017. John Cabot Academy will remain one of the two sites offering sixth form education for the other schools in the trust.

Main findings

You have made good strides in improving the quality of provision and leadership across the school since taking up your appointment in September 2016. You have communicated a clear vision to staff and pupils and have raised expectations of what each can achieve. You have made clear the importance of simultaneously raising standards for Year 11 and embedding a culture of high expectations across the school for the long term. Your senior staff have responded well to the challenges you have set.

You and your senior colleagues have drawn up an action plan that addresses the key areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The plan is detailed and specific. It focuses clearly on improving behaviour and attendance and on raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders at all levels understand the school's priorities and their role in carrying out the plans successfully.

Leaders and governors recognise that a focus on raising standards and improving achievement is essential if the school is to be judged as a good school at the next section 5 inspection. You are right, therefore, to ensure that you highlight the progress of pupils over time when evaluating the quality of teaching in the school.

The school has developed what appears to be a comprehensive system to track and monitor pupils' performance. Your staff work with other schools in the Cabot Learning Federation and beyond to test and check pupils' understanding, while at the same time working together to ensure that teachers' judgements are accurate and reliable. This is helping you to monitor improvements effectively and to identify emerging issues when improvement is not rapid enough.

There is emerging evidence that teachers' work to improve teaching and learning across departments is having a positive effect on the engagement and progress of pupils. In science, for example, pupils are responding well to the higher expectations that teachers now have of them. Equally, pupils are beginning to respond to teachers' guidance on how to improve their work. The school's work with teachers in supporting disadvantaged pupils is also taking effect. Although these strategies are not yet completely embedded, the early signs are that they are having an impact.

You and your senior team have reacted promptly and effectively to the behaviour and attendance issues which were highlighted in the previous inspection report. You have emphasised the importance of attendance to all pupils and systems to monitor absence have been tightened. As a result, attendance is now rising. Good work has been done with staff and pupils to agree on expectations of behaviour, and these are having an impact. As a result of your work this year, the number of pupils excluded for poor behaviour has fallen. You are aware, however, that the proportion of pupils excluded who are disadvantaged is still too high and your staff are working to reduce it. In our visits to classrooms we saw strong relationships between teachers and pupils and we saw no instances of poor behaviour.

You are using the ongoing re-organisation of sixth form provision across the learning federation as a good opportunity to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment for students studying at the school. Strong and clear leadership is ensuring that the priorities for improvement of the school and those of the learning federation's sixth form are aligned and all staff are clear about their roles.

Governance has been strengthened in light of the recommendations for improvement arising from the previous inspection. Directors and councillors recognise and accept the issues raised in the report and are holding leaders to account for the improvements required. The academy council has just undertaken a review of governance and is in the process of integrating the recommendations from the report into the 2017/18 governance plan.

External support

The support provided by the Cabot Learning Federation (CLF) to the school has been a significant factor in the school's effective response to the previous inspection report. Improvements to governance and leadership, in particular the leadership of teaching, learning and assessment, have been supported well by CLF staff. For example, good use is being made of the trust's network of subject specialists to develop teaching across the curriculum and to support improved achievement.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Lovett
Her Majesty's Inspector