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Mr Tony Segalini
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Dear Mr Segalini

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kettering Science Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 4 December 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders, members of the local governing body and the trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the academy to become good.

The academy should take further action to:

- secure the current improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, across all subject areas and year groups
- ensure that additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is allocated precisely, to improve these pupils' progress and attendance, and reduce the proportion of these pupils who are excluded.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, including the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and the head of sixth form, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I met with a group of subject

leaders and the coordinator of the provision for pupils with SEND. I observed pupils' learning in a small number of lessons, jointly with a vice principal. I met with a group of pupils in Years 10 and 11 to discuss their learning and reviewed evidence of this with them in their workbooks. A meeting was held with members of the governing body, including the vice-chair, which the chair of governors joined via the telephone. I also met with the trust's chief executive officer and the executive principal.

I scrutinised documents including senior leaders' evaluations of the school's work and the school improvement plan. I examined documents relating to current pupils' achievement as well as their attendance and exclusions records. I considered a range of different policies on the school's website and recent minutes relating to the school's governance. I reviewed leaders' checks on staff's suitability to work with children.

Context

Until recently, the school has experienced instability of leadership. The principal at the previous inspection stepped down from the role in June 2017. You were appointed acting-associate principal in July 2017. This position was confirmed in September 2018.

As part of leaders' long-term plans to improve the school, you have restructured its senior leadership. Since September 2017, five assistant principals and one vice-principal have joined the team, leading to a review of senior leadership responsibilities. The team is now made up of you, two vice-principals and seven assistant principals. Since September 2018, including changes at a senior level, 12 new teachers have joined the school. Of these, two are subject leaders, one overseeing science and the other design, technology and art.

At a trust level, an executive principal was appointed in January 2018 to support leaders' work and bring about improvements.

Main findings

Since taking up the position as associate principal, you and other senior leaders have communicated a clear, uncompromising vision about improving the quality of education received by the pupils. Leaders have developed positive relationships with staff, who are supportive, enthusiastic and want the school to improve. Leaders encourage everyone to 'be the best you can be across all areas of school life'. This mantra is beginning to filter down to the pupils. They talk eloquently about their aspirations and appreciate teachers' work to help them achieve their potential.

Leadership of the school has been strengthened with the appointment of the executive principal in January 2018. With her support, leaders' evaluations of the school's strengths are detailed and accurate. However, they do not shy away from

ongoing weaknesses that are yet to be resolved. Leaders' plans to bring about school improvements are appropriately focused. In addition, subject leaders are acquiring the necessary skills to carry out their roles more effectively. They evaluate the impact of their teams' work and implement improvement strategies that complement and contribute to whole-school development plans. With much stronger lines of communication and accountability at all levels, leaders' work to improve the quality of education is having a positive impact on pupils' outcomes.

Governors are well supported by the trust. They have improved the effectiveness of their work to challenge school leaders and are beginning to hold them to account more precisely. Newly forged links to individual subject areas help them to develop a more in-depth understanding of the school's work. With increased educational expertise in their ranks, governors focus more closely on specific aspects of the school's improvement plans and are able to interpret pupils' outcomes information with increasing skill.

Leaders monitor the quality of the sixth-form provision closely. The leader of the sixth form meets regularly with subject leaders to discuss students' progress in their areas of responsibility. In response, teachers implement targeted support for students promptly. In 2018, students' attainment improved, according to provisional information. Leaders are planning to broaden the post-16 curriculum offer, including an increased range of vocational courses, to help improve the recruitment and retention of sixth-form students.

Leaders adopt a consistent approach to raising expectations of teachers' classroom practice. They have implemented a rigorous programme to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning across all subject areas. Leaders carry out regular learning walks, focused on the school's core values, for example 'engagement'. With a more positive and collaborative culture, teachers are involved in learning walks, helping them to share good practice among colleagues. Leaders use information from the quality assurance programme to plan training for teachers, including individualised support where necessary. This includes, for example, training on how to promote good behaviour for learning or how to engage the least able pupils effectively.

Subject leaders are increasingly accountable for the work in their areas of responsibility. They are more confident interpreting and discussing information about pupils' progress with senior leaders, including the progress of particular pupil groups. Subject leaders work closely with teachers to plan focused support for any pupils who are underachieving.

Leaders are ambitious for pupils and what they can achieve. However, while the quality of teaching is improving, it is not yet consistently good across all subjects and year groups. In 2018, pupils made broadly average progress, including in English and mathematics, although there has been a legacy of underperformance in some subjects including art, design and technology, and media. The progress of

current Year 11 pupils indicates that the impact of leaders' improvements is becoming sustained, notably for mathematics. However, disadvantaged pupils do not make consistently good progress across all subjects and year groups. Some pupils currently in Year 9 are not making the progress that they should due to poor behaviour. Since September 2018, leaders have provided pupils with SEND, disadvantaged pupils and the least able pupils with more focused support with their learning. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of these strategies on these pupils' outcomes.

Positive, respectful relationships between adults and pupils mean that pupils readily seek help and guidance when necessary. During learning observations, carried out jointly with the vice-principal, some teachers used skilled questioning to explore and extend pupils' understanding, for instance in English. Some teachers make effective use of pupils' information to inform their planning, so that activities are closely matched to their starting points and any barriers to pupils' learning are minimised. These teachers provide pupils with challenging feedback as to how they can improve and help pupils to become increasingly independent in their learning. However, this is not the case consistently across all subject areas. Where teachers' expectations are not consistently high, pupils do not make good progress.

The key stage 4 curriculum allows a majority of pupils the opportunity to achieve the government's 'Progress 8' measure. In 2018, almost all pupils secured education, employment or training after Year 11. However, leaders are evaluating aspects of the school's curriculum to ensure that it does not prohibit any groups of pupils from achieving, for example white British boys.

Leaders have introduced new strategies to encourage more parents to engage readily with their children's learning. For instance, as part of the transition process from primary schools, parents of existing pupils at the school share their experiences with parents of pupils in Year 6 to help smooth the transition. Parents of pupils with SEND have been offered training to support their children with their literacy needs. Leaders also gather parents' views through parent forums.

In 2018, pupils' attendance was above the national average. The proportion of pupils who were persistently absent was below the national average. Most pupils enjoy coming to school and pupils' current attendance remains strong, including in the sixth form. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND is too low and declining. Leaders' recent actions to improve the attendance of these groups of pupils are yet to have impact.

When teaching is not sufficiently strong, a small minority of pupils engage in low-level disruption because the work is not meeting their needs appropriately. The proportion of pupils excluded from school for poor behaviour is above the national average and slowly increasing. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND are disproportionately more likely to be excluded from lessons, both formally and internally, when compared with other pupils.

Increasingly, leaders use a multidisciplinary approach with pupils at risk of exclusion, to meet their behavioural, social, emotional and mental health needs. Behaviour support plans, a bespoke curriculum and individual key workers have been successful at avoiding repeat exclusions with a small group of pupils. Leaders' use of alternative provision to provide pupils with education off-site has dramatically decreased. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this support on bringing about a sustained reduction in the proportion of pupils excluded from school.

External support

The trust has provided effective support in improving all aspects of the school. For example, they have acted swiftly to secure additional senior leaders to increase leadership capacity, including the recent appointment of a temporary assistant principal to oversee pupils' outcomes. In addition, since her appointment, an executive principal has worked closely with leaders to identify the school's strengths and weaknesses and ensure that leaders at all levels are accountable for their work.

Directors of subjects from the trust help teachers improve the quality and effectiveness of their practice, as well as providing focused support to small groups of pupils to improve their outcomes. Meanwhile, teachers collaborate regularly with colleagues from other schools within the trust to improve the accuracy and consistency of teachers' assessments of pupils' work.

Training opportunities offered by the trust have helped to improve the skills of leaders and teachers. For instance, trust leaders have provided governors with guidance related to safeguarding and interpreting pupils' outcomes information. Similarly, some teachers have received training on how to motivate boys, while others have considered the role of middle leaders.

I am copying this letter to the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Tordoff
Her Majesty's Inspector