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Mr John Higgins
Ash Hill Academy
Hatfield
Doncaster
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Dear Mr Higgins

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ash Hill Academy

Following my visit to your school on 30 January 2019, 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 school 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 and the multi-academy trust (MAT) are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- strengthen its pupil premium strategy so that it clearly sets out how continued improvement in the attendance, progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils will be secured
- enhance teachers' knowledge, skills and practice in meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
- improve attendance and reduce levels of persistent absence and fixed-term exclusion.

Evidence

During the inspection, I had meetings with you, senior and middle leaders, four representatives of the academy advisory body (AAB) and two representatives of the MAT to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited lessons, talked

to pupils and looked at the work in their books. I evaluated the school development plan and looked at a range of documents relating to self-evaluation, the school's safeguarding arrangements, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare.

Main findings

You and your senior leaders are tackling the areas requiring improvement successfully. You have an accurate picture of the school's performance and your development plan is sharply focused on the areas needing further work. Importantly, you have secured the strong support of your colleagues, who share your drive and determination to move the school to good at its next section 5 inspection.

You have ambitious plans for improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Middle leaders – strongly supported by the MAT's subject directors – are making an increasingly important contribution to developing the curriculum and improving teaching in the subjects they lead. As a result, teachers' practice is improving and there is an upward trend in the outcomes achieved by pupils. Improvements in teaching in English are impacting positively on pupils' learning and progress. For example, key stage 4 pupils are developing their understanding of how to compare and comment on poetry and improve the standard of their narrative-style writing. Although there has been sustained improvement in the outcomes achieved by disadvantaged pupils, you recognise that they do not do as well as other pupils nationally and more needs to be done to improve their learning and progress.

You have radically changed the school's approach to identifying, assessing and meeting the needs of pupils with SEND. They are being supported in a more purposeful way – in part – because teaching assistants have a better understanding of their needs and the difficulties they experience. Improved teaching and more focused support are having a positive impact on this group of pupils. Importantly, however, you have identified that teachers need further training and support to enhance their knowledge, skills and practice in meeting pupils' widely different SEND.

There has been a marked improvement in pupils' attitudes to learning and behaviour since the last section 5 inspection. Increasingly, pupils work hard and apply themselves well. In Year 7, 10 and 11 English lessons, for example, pupils are keen to explain their ideas about character, plot and the language features used by writers, using evidence from the poetry and prose they are studying. Crucially, attendance has increased and levels of persistent absence and fixed-term exclusion have decreased. However, the strong improvement in these outcomes during 2017/18 has not been sustained in 2018/19, especially for disadvantaged pupils. Levels of absence, persistent absence and fixed-term exclusion remain higher than the national averages. Your current pupil premium strategy does not set out with

enough clarity and precision how improvement in these important outcomes will be achieved for disadvantaged pupils.

The AAB makes a strong contribution to the school's leadership and governance. Members of the AAB are knowledgeable about important areas of the school's work. They are meticulous in checking the impact of actions in the school development plan on the quality of education and the outcomes achieved by pupils.

External support

Effective support has been provided by the MAT. Subject directors provide highly valued subject and curriculum expertise and contribute strongly to the development of middle leaders. The MAT's effective oversight of the school's performance adds significantly to your drive for rapid and sustained improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Nick Whittaker
Her Majesty's Inspector