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24 April 2018

Mr Jamie MacLean  
Principal  
Dover Christ Church Academy  
Melbourne Avenue  
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Dover  
Kent  
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Dear Mr MacLean

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Dover Christ Church Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 27 March 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 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, governors and trustees are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- improve pupils' spelling, grammar and punctuation
- ensure that all pupils try as hard as they can at all times so that they make the progress of which they are capable.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and with other senior leaders responsible for various aspects of the school's work. I also met with groups of subject leaders, teachers and pupils. I spoke with the chair of the governing body, who is also chair of the board of trustees, and a staff governor. I spoke to a representative of the local authority on the telephone.

Together, we visited nine lessons during the course of the day. In addition, I scrutinised a sample of pupils' work. I reviewed the school improvement plan, as well as a number of other documents that you made available to me. The arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils were evaluated.

## **Context**

The current chair of governors took up his post in May 2017. The new principal and assistant vice-principal were appointed in September 2017.

## **Main findings**

On your appointment, you lost no time in evaluating the work of the school and putting in place a new cycle of improvement. You have rightly focused your actions on improving the quality of teaching and on accelerating pupils' progress. Central to your vision is a focus on the curriculum and assessment. For example, your early decision to revert to a three-year key stage 3 curriculum was motivated by a desire for pupils to have access to the full national curriculum for as long as possible. At key stage 4, you have checked that the curriculum contains a well-considered balance between those subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) and subjects that pupils can choose to study. You have ensured that pupils who wish to study vocational subjects at key stage 4 have a clear progression path to further education and on into the world of work in the local economy.

At the start of the school year, you required subject leaders to review all schemes of work, so that in each subject, the knowledge and skills that pupils need to master are stated clearly and organised in a logical sequence. Subject leaders and teachers have responded with enthusiasm to this initiative. They welcome the trust you have placed in them to lead curriculum development. Consequently, staff morale is high. Teachers are excited about their work at the school and feel well supported by you and your leadership team. One teacher said, 'the leadership is inspirational'.

You recognise that the initiatives you have brought in since September show promise, but have not yet had time to become fully embedded into every lesson.

Published results for 2017 show that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able, made below-average progress from their low starting points in English, mathematics and a range of subjects. However, pupils, including disadvantaged

pupils and the most able, made progress that was above the national average in those subjects that they were able to choose for key stage 4.

Current progress information shows that the majority of pupils in all year groups have made rapid progress this year from their well-below-average starting points. 'Aspen 2' is the district specialist provision, within Dover Christ Church Academy, for secondary aged pupils who have education, health and care plans to meet their severe and complex learning needs. Pupils who attend Aspen 2 also continue to make exceptionally strong progress because the work they are given to do is very well matched to their needs.

However, 2018 outcomes for the current Year 11 cohort in the main school are likely to be below average owing to a legacy of high staff turnover in previous years. Current pupils' progress in key stage 3 is much stronger, because they have benefited from consistently strong teaching. Leaders are rightly focused on the progress of the most able, disadvantaged and those in the main school who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. In addition, leaders have rightly identified that pupils' poor reading and writing are a barrier to their progress. Although teachers make a point of teaching their pupils to use subject-specific vocabulary, work in pupils' books reveals a high number of spelling, grammar and punctuation errors.

The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection, though some inconsistencies remain. With your governing body, you have been successful in recruiting specialist teachers in all subjects. As a result, the majority of teachers use their strong subject knowledge to ask questions that probe pupils' understanding and set tasks that provide the right level of challenge for them. For example, in science, Year 8 pupils made strong progress because the teacher's questions subtly guided them to work out the answers to problems that they had not previously encountered. Well-designed tasks enabled pupils in Aspen 2 to gain a good understanding of similes and metaphors. In the increasingly rare instances where teaching over time is less effective, pupils in the main school are not always required to work as hard as they should. In these cases, pupils' written work is often unfinished or scrappy and the progress that they make is not rapid or deep enough.

Around one fifth of teachers, several of whom are newly qualified, have been appointed during the current academic year. In addition, the school hosts a large number of trainee teachers at various points in the year. The school draws well on the expertise of the sponsoring trust to ensure that training and mentoring arrangements for experienced, newly qualified and trainee teachers are of the highest quality. Teachers confirm that the training they receive has helped them to improve their practice. In particular, they value the many opportunities they have to work with their colleagues to plan lessons and moderate assessments of pupils' work.

Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. The majority of pupils are polite, proud of their school and ambitious for their own futures. However, fixed-term exclusions remain above the national average. Since your arrival, you have reviewed the behaviour policy and have issued more stringent penalties, including fixed-term exclusions, for pupils who are verbally abusive to teachers or to each other. After a peak in the autumn term, the number of exclusions, including repeat exclusions, is beginning to fall. Pupils and staff agree that behaviour has improved since your arrival.

Attendance remains a little below the national average, especially for disadvantaged pupils and girls who previously had very poor attendance. Leaders responsible for this area of the school's work are relentless in their efforts to engage with the families of pupils who are frequently absent. They have had some success in improving pupils' attendance, particularly girls' attendance, as a result of initiatives such as a parents' early help group. However, you recognise that more needs to be done to ensure that pupils are in school every day and learning.

The governing body provides effective strategic leadership. Governors review their annual plan, organised around the school's main priorities, regularly. Through well-established committees, governors have a clear line of sight to the impact of leaders' work, including in safeguarding. Governors ensure that they get the information they need to hold leaders stringently to account for the quality of teaching and for the progress that pupils make. Governors are actively involved in discussions with local and national groups to help to secure the next stage in the development of the school.

Leaders, governors, teachers and other staff give the highest priority to pupils' safety and emotional well-being. Staff and governors receive regular training in keeping pupils safe. Rightly, leaders impress upon staff the need to be ever-vigilant. Staff are confident in their ability to identify safeguarding concerns and know how to report any concerns they may have. All leaders with responsibility for safeguarding liaise well with a range of external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families get timely support. Following a recent local authority review of safeguarding, its recommendations were implemented in full. Governors plan to carry out a further safeguarding audit in the summer term.

### **External support**

The sponsoring trust provides invaluable strategic and practical support. Trustees have played a significant role in the drive to bring specialist teachers and a new crop of leaders into the school. They have also drawn on the university's specialism in teacher training to provide expert support for the mentors of newly qualified and trainee teachers. You have also benefited from the support of a local teaching school to provide effective training and development for subject leaders.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and 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

Gary Holden

**Her Majesty's Inspector**