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15 June 2015

David Elliot  
Headteacher  
New Line Learning Academy  
Boughton Lane  
Maidstone  
ME15 9QL

Dear Mr Elliot

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to New Line Learning Academy**

Following my visit to your school on 12 June 2015, 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 February 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors and trustees are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Leaders should take further action to:

- strengthen the approach to improving the accuracy and presentation of students' writing, by ensuring that all teachers incorporate sufficient time in their plans to address this routinely through their teaching.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders and a trustee to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan and looked at other documentation, including your current achievement data and a 'precision teachers' folder (PTF); a version of which exists for each member of the teaching staff employed at every level, detailing minimum expectations of teachers,

leaders and managers. You escorted me on a tour of the academy enabling me to observe students and teachers at their work. I also spoke on the telephone with the Chair of the Governing body and the Chief Executive of the trust.

## **Main findings**

Since the previous inspection you have wasted no time in returning rapidly to your improvement agenda. The inspection outcomes were not a surprise to you or members of your governing body. You accept fully that although you had already identified the key areas for improvement noted within the report as urgent priorities, strategies already implemented had not yielded sufficient gains. Since the inspection you have focused sensibly on strengthening leadership and management and improving the quality of teaching. You have revised appropriately the school improvement plan to ensure that it incorporates fully the weaknesses identified within the inspection report. The plan is comprehensive and identifies a range of necessary and well-judged actions. However, the plan needs to be adjusted so that timescales can be identified and governors can be clearer about how and when success will be measured. The identification of a named lead for each aspect of the plan will also ensure that governors can identify who will be accountable for implementing the agreed actions within deadline so that an appreciable difference to students' learning and achievement takes place.

In order to improve the effectiveness of leadership at a senior level, you have re-revised job descriptions and re-structured the senior team. New appointments to the senior team are now linked to each of the main curriculum areas of English, mathematics, science and humanities. Although these strategies auger well, it is too soon to judge their effectiveness. Members of the interim academic board which consists of the chief executive, trustees and the Chair of the Governing body, continue to meet with you on a fortnightly basis. During these meetings, governors and trustees rightly focus on requiring you to evidence how you know if students' are learning well. Students' current achievement data is scrutinised and where students are lagging behind, governors expect you to account for how you intend to address this effectively. The scrutiny of teaching observations, students' work and their current achievement data are now standard agenda items for this fortnightly meeting, alongside revisiting the improvement plan targets.

To clarify expectations of staff at all levels, including line-managers, you have developed a guide, the PTF, which makes clear exactly what activities are expected of those at classroom level and those with leadership accountabilities. This helpful file, ensures that there are no grey areas. In particular you and your leaders monitor teaching assiduously. You also meet each week with leaders of mathematics and English to track students' progress and ensure that your predictions for the 2016 GCSE examination hold true.

To improve teaching you have revised the guidelines on marking and have made clear your expectations to staff. To ensure consistency you are checking teachers'

implementation routinely through random scrutiny of students' work. Although you have implemented some successful intervention strategies to improve students' reading and literacy skills, you acknowledge that improving the accuracy of students' writing will require a shift in emphasis and planning for all teachers across all subjects.

Over a period of time you have critically evaluated ways in which the curriculum can be accessed by students more effectively. This has already led to successful re-scheduling of where certain subjects are taught, such as mathematics. This sensible process continues apace. For example, you express valid concerns in relation to the impact of the large 'plaza' learning areas on students' progress in certain subjects where noise interference is recognised as a barrier to learning. As a result, you and your governors are now in the process of considering further changes to ensure that more effective subject delivery and improved learning can take place across all subjects.

The newly adopted senior team structure has been designed to support improved delivery of the curriculum and enable leaders to monitor effectively the quality of students' learning. An unequivocal requirement for strong subject knowledge and expertise has been a guiding principle behind governors' recruitment policy. Furthermore, throughout this term, while in the process of recruiting you have ensured that students have been able to benefit from high quality learning by drawing on strong practitioners from elsewhere within the trust, particularly in areas such as science. Leaders' strong focus on building teachers' skills to use assessment information more effectively to inform and improve the quality of lesson planning, is ensuring that teachers are well-supported to help students make the necessary gains in their learning. Levels of commitment are high. Staff that have been unwilling or unable to improve the quality of their work have left.

Homework is the subject of greater scrutiny than in the past. Leaders are sampling homework at regular intervals and evaluating its impact on students' learning. In particular, you have responded to parental concerns by establishing a parents' focus groups populated by those who expressed initial concerns. This group has already met and feedback from those who were unhappy with the consistency of homework set is now much more positive.

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

### **External support**

New Line Learning Academy is one of two secondary schools within the Future Schools multi-academy trust. Since the inspection which took place in February leaders have continued to draw on the expertise of best practitioners within the trust to support improvements to specific curriculum areas, such as science. Some of the staff newly appointed to the academy this term have been drawn from within the

trust. Leaders have also continued to draw on support from Kent local authority advisers where necessary. Over time, this targeted support has helped secure improvements in students' progress in mathematics and English but has yet to impact on other lower performing areas such as science.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Farmer  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**