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30 April 2013

Mrs S Khan-Jones
Principal
Sandown Bay Academy
The Fairway
Sandown
Isle of Wight
PO36 9LH

Dear Mrs Khan-Jones

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sandown Bay Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 29 April 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior staff, the national director of education of Academies Enterprise Trust (AET), the academy's sponsor, and another representative of the governing body. There was a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority the day after the visit. The sponsor's statement of action and the academy's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

At the time of the previous inspection, you were interim Principal; your position has since been made permanent. The associate headteacher's two-year fixed-term appointment has also been ratified. The national director of education of AET will assume the role of Executive Principal and will work with the academy closely. The governing body is in the process of being replaced by a management and improvement board which will exercise governance and oversight of the academy for the foreseeable future. Plans to reorganise senior team roles are complete and staff

will take up their new responsibilities later this term. New subject leaders for English, mathematics and languages have been appointed for September.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

You and your senior team have responded positively to the concerns raised in the last inspection. You are currently addressing aspects of the work of the academy which need urgent improvement, and some progress is already evident. Some teaching has improved as a result of well-targeted intervention, training and mentoring. Students' attendance is improving as a result of a significant reduction in the number who are persistently absent, and the greater involvement of parents and carers, staff and students in measures designed to reduce bullying are beginning to make a difference. Attempts to stabilise staffing, particularly in English, have reduced the number of lessons in which students are not taught by their regular teacher.

The academy is now more confident of the quality of its systems to measure and analyse the achievement of students, and this data is being used better to target support and intervention. You are using this information to address the gaps in the performance of specific key groups, for example disabled students and those who have special educational needs, and students who are eligible for extra support using the pupil premium. Strategies include broadening the extent and nature of the 'combined curriculum' in Key Stage 3 for those who may otherwise struggle, and an 'assertive mentoring' programme for students in Year 11. Current analyses of achievement indicate that the academy is on course to improve GCSE examination results in 2013.

Interventions to improve the quality of teaching and learning are quicker and more responsive to individual and departmental needs. Judgements of the quality of teaching are now very usefully linked to the current and previous progress of students. Better academy-wide approaches to lesson planning are enabling teachers to understand the vital importance of making sure that students of different abilities are given appropriate work in every lesson, and they are constantly monitoring their progress to steer the learning during the lesson. Steps to assure the quality of all marking have been taken. The standards that teachers should expect of students are becoming better defined, and the culture of underachievement is beginning to be tackled.

Some grades and commentary in the academy's self-evaluation are optimistic. This is due to premature judgements: initiatives are being judged on their potential for generating improvement before they have the chance to become embedded good practice. For example, there are now stronger mechanisms to ensure that middle leaders are accountable, but these systems and structures are still quite new and

need to move through a whole cycle and then be carefully evaluated. Middle leaders also need to reflect the stronger accountability they now experience in their work with senior leaders in their regular work with their staff.

The sponsor, AET, has given the academy useful support in addressing weaknesses in teaching in English and mathematics, and by providing whole-academy training. Good systems from AET, for example in monitoring and analysing teaching quality, have been adopted by the academy successfully. The academy's contact with the local authority has been infrequent, and its support this year has been limited to the alternative provision for the few students with severe behavioural needs.

Many of the key elements of improvement planning are in place, and they support the academy's work well. However, development planning processes are not organised well enough to enable key stakeholders to be able to use, and contribute to, high-level planning. Governors are well informed about the details of many developments and their impact, but they do not have high-level development planning documents and regular updates, and are therefore unable to carry out their vital function of holding the academy to account at a strategic level. Neither is the sponsor, AET, well informed about some aspects of the academy's development planning processes and how plans are progressing. Although the sponsor's statement of action was prepared in collaboration with the academy, and contains a useful level of detail, you and your senior staff and AET did not work sufficiently closely to ensure that all aspects of the academy's action plan were in place by the time of this visit.

Following the monitoring inspection, these judgements were made:

The sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The academy's improvement plan is not fit for purpose. It will be scrutinised during the second visit.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for the Isle of Wight, and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector