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20 May 2013

Mrs Lawson
Headteacher
Fort Hill Community School
Kenilworth Road
Basingstoke
RG23 8JQ

Dear Mrs Lawson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fort Hill Community School

Following my visit to your school on 20 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, three heads of subject, a representative of the local authority and the Chair of the Governing Body plus three other governors to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and I looked at documents used by leaders to monitor and evaluate the school's work. I also accompanied you on a walk around the school visiting eight classrooms.

Context

Since the previous inspection a new clerk to the governing body has been appointed.

Main findings

You and senior leaders have set about tackling the weaknesses identified by the previous inspection report with determination and energy. There is a positive climate within the school and all senior and middle leaders spoken to were committed to driving improvement.

The school's rapid action plan acknowledges the low achievement of Year 11 students in 2012 and identifies appropriate strategies to address all the areas for improvement in the previous inspection report. The person responsible for leading each actively is clearly identified and the timing of actions are sensible and well-paced. The plan also contains suitably challenging targets for improvement in teaching and students' achievement. However, the plan does not make it sufficiently clear how the impact of actions will be monitored and evaluated. For example, although the plan identifies the relevant governor sub-committee that is responsible for evaluating the impact of actions it does not indicate when or how this should occur.

You and other senior leaders have been pro-active in establishing a firm foundation to improve the quality of teaching. Observation of lessons appropriately identifies the impact of teaching on the learning experience of students. The findings are being used to identify practice that requires improvement and pinpoint areas for teachers to work on. Some sensible strategies are also being developed to share the best teaching practice in the school.

Expectations regarding students' progress are being raised through the setting of more challenging targets. The system to track the progress of students towards these targets has been refined so that underperforming students and groups of students are more easily identified. Specific support for these students is beginning to have an impact on raising their achievement. The information on students' progress is being used increasingly effectively to hold subject leaders accountable for students' achievement.

A local authority review of the effectiveness of the governing body has taken place since the previous inspection. This identified that governors are not pro-active enough in finding out about the impact of school leaders on the quality of teaching and students' achievement. As a consequence they are not providing a sufficient level of challenge to school leaders. The governing body has begun to address these issues and some sensible plans are in place to improve their practice.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, I recommend that further action is taken to:

- strengthen the school's rapid action plan by clearly identifying when and how the impact of actions taken will be monitored and evaluated
- rapidly implement the plans to improve the effectiveness of the school's governing body.

I will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection. I recommend that a further monitoring inspection is carried out during the next academic year to assess how well placed the school is to undergo its next inspection.

External support

The school and the local authority are working well together to improve students' achievement. The local authority has provided some effective support which is assisting school improvement. For example, helpful support has been provided for improving teaching and learning and the effectiveness of the governing body.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector