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19 June 2013

Mr Gates
Cowplain Community School
Hart plain Ave
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Waterlooville
PO8 8RY

Dear Mr Gates

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Cowplain Community School

Following my visit to your academy on 19 June 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in April 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and other senior staff, the chair and the vice-chair of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The academy's action plan was evaluated.

Context

You arrived at the school shortly after the previous section 5 inspection, and have already reorganised your senior team, appointing two of the three assistant headteachers as acting deputies. You have also appointed a new assistant headteacher from September, who will join the senior team. Two directors of learning have been appointed to the extended senior team from September, following the resignation of the heads of mathematics and English.

Main findings

You quickly and accurately assessed the needs of the academy and decided to implement some significant staffing and structural changes immediately. These decisions have the full backing of the governing body. The actions taken so far have the capacity to help you to address the developmental needs of the academy, including those that were highlighted as priorities in the recent inspection report.

- Your re-structuring of the senior team makes responsibilities much clearer and accountabilities sharper. You have appointed for September a new head of English, who will be responsible for improvements in students' literacy skills, and a new head of mathematics who will have responsibility for numeracy.
- The curriculum in Years 9 and 11 has been changed from September 2013 to increase usefully the time allocations for English and mathematics, in response to the need to improve standards in these areas.
- Achievement and teaching in mathematics were highlighted as being in need of urgent improvement. You are confident that the new head of department will bring a fresh approach. Your appointment of an advanced skills teacher in mathematics to work alongside existing staff gives the opportunity for improvements to be made in the quality of teaching, and intervention strategies with individual groups to be organised rapidly in response to need. The department will move to a new suite of rooms in the academy which provides better accommodation and more opportunities for closer team working, as well as signalling change.
- The systems in the academy to monitor and analyse students' achievements were in need of significant improvement and this is being addressed with appropriate urgency. The deputy headteacher with responsibility for improving the quality of teaching recognises the need for this information to be accurate and reliable. She realises that this would help her to identify which aspects of teaching require improvement, and check whether they are improving over time.
- Subject leaders' roles are currently being re-defined and clarified. Their job has been re-designated as 'achievement delivery', which makes the kinds of changes you want to see in the way they work apparent. You are now requiring them to take responsibility for students' outcomes, rather than the quality of systems and processes in the academy. This has the capacity to strengthen greatly their effectiveness in driving up achievement by beginning to work more directly with their teams to improve teaching, and to find new ways of tackling old problems.
- You have recognised the current underachievement of pupils entitled to free school meals, and are planning to address their needs better. This issue is appropriately identified as a priority in your action plan and there is the intention to monitor the progress of this group of students much more closely in future.

- The responsibilities of the special educational needs coordinator are to be expanded to encompass the achievement of all potentially vulnerable young people. This gives him and his team exciting opportunities to make real differences to the lives of the youngsters who face significant challenges and who may otherwise not enjoy, or benefit from, all that the academy has to offer.
- Your action plan is a full and detailed document; it has the capacity to steer improvements. However, it is lengthy, and sometimes the key priorities become lost in the detail. It does not illustrate clearly what the school will be like when your plans have been successful.
- Plans to improve the quality of teaching are being established and a good start has been made on reflecting on how good teachers can support teachers whose work requires improvement. The plan to develop teaching lacks precision in describing how training will be aimed where it will have most impact, and how monitoring will be used to inform further support and training. Work has begun on addressing key issues such as the use of assessment to drive good progress, and the role of marking and written feedback to students in giving them information about their next steps. Governors are strengthening their capacity to make use of performance management processes to recognise and reward good teaching, and a new pay policy is being written to further improve the links between outcomes and pay.
- Although there are signs that an increased emphasis on reading is beginning to have some impact, there is a lot more that needs to be done to encourage students to read widely and for pleasure, as well as to support their progress in all subjects, and to produce high quality written work in all subjects. You are aware of this and have plans to launch a new literacy strategy after the new director of learning for English and literacy has taken up post in September.
- Governors are very pleased with the pace of change already, and the decisive way in which it is being implemented. They are keenly aware of the need for them to continue to be strong critical friends of you and the other senior staff, and they are currently reflecting on how they may best oversee the impact of these developments, in order to do this.

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

- drive up achievement in mathematics strongly, capitalising on all of the changes you have already put in place for September, and a variety of external support
- refine plans to improve the quality of teaching to allow the identification of specific strengths and weaknesses in teaching by individuals and in

departments, so that strengths in one area can be used to meet needs in another, training can be targeted accurately, and middle leaders prepared to take up the reins of improving teaching when they are ready

- implement a literacy strategy as soon as possible in the autumn term, and monitor its implementation and impact frequently
- target the needs of students eligible for free school meals so that they obtain maximum benefit from your use of the pupil premium, and the current wide differences in their achievement and their peers closes
- continually reinforce your vision of what the academy will be like in two years' time, to give context and emphasis to all of the important detail in the development plan.

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

External support

Good relationships have been maintained with the local authority and they are keen to play an active role in supporting improvements in the academy. The local authority leadership and learning partner is already working closely with you. The academy is also part of a close and active group of local schools who work together and share ideas and resources. You show a good willingness to reach out and obtain more support from appropriate sources, including the local authority.

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

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector