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17 July 2013

Jane Lockley & Mark Arnull
Acting Headteachers
Colton Hills Community School A Specialist Language College
Jeremy Road
Goldthorn Park
Wolverhampton
WV4 5DG

Dear Mrs Lockley & Mr Arnull

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Colton Hills Community School A Specialist Language College

Following my visit to your school on 16 July 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 May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the headteacher designate, as well as with faculty leaders, students, representatives of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school's improvement plans were evaluated. I visited lessons briefly with you and looked at students' books on a tour of the school. Documentation was scrutinised, including records of the outcomes of monitoring activities and of the work of the governing body.

Context

The new headteacher, due to take up post in September 2013, has been able to visit the school regularly and contribute to the development of the post-inspection action plan, which has been discussed and approved by governors. You, as current acting headteachers, will resume your roles as deputy headteachers in September.

Main findings

You have given the school effective leadership through a period of substantial upheaval and change, following the retirement of the previous headteacher in January 2013. In particular, you have driven a change in the culture of the school to one of greater openness and transparency, and promoted a sense of shared responsibility for improvement across staff, governors and students. Together with the governors, you have tackled head-on the financial challenges presented by a fall in numbers of students on roll, with clear and coherent proposals for restructuring the school's leadership, staffing, curriculum, and pastoral organisation. Additionally, you have managed the extensive refurbishment and rebuilding of much of the school's site with government funding.

Students speak positively of the impact of changes which have been introduced, noting higher expectations among teachers for standards of work and behaviour. They value the initiatives which have been launched to make their views heard about the quality of education they receive, though some would appreciate more forums for consultation about wider matters of school development.

Monitoring of teaching and learning by senior and middle leaders has been increasingly regular and developmental, with the aim of securing much more consistent implementation of school policies than had been evident at the time of the last inspection. Lesson observations and 'drop-ins' which are focused on specific aspects of practice give teachers clear points for development and improvement. Marking is increasingly detailed and helpful, and in some subjects, such as science and the humanities, marking pays particular attention to supporting the development of students' literacy skills. Students particularly value the opportunities provided in some subjects, such as English, to spend time responding to teachers' comments by completing, correcting or improving their work.

You have encouraged teachers to 'make learning memorable' and promoted a shift towards more student activity than teacher direction in the classroom. An increased focus on promoting students' basic literacy and numeracy skills is evident, for example in the close tracking of students' basic skills development in mathematics.

The school's post-inspection action plan is focused sharply on areas for improvement set out in the previous inspection report. It has clear criteria for success, and sets out helpful milestones against which improvement can be evaluated over time, although the role of governors and others in evaluating such progress needs to be made more explicit. Some of the targets for improvement in students' achievement in the coming year are not sufficiently ambitious for a school which aspires to becoming securely 'good'. Faculty improvement plans give detailed consideration to changes in aspects of provision, but many lack sufficiently detailed and quantifiable criteria to measure success in terms of improved achievement for all groups of students. The performance management targets of teachers and other staff are not

yet aligned sufficiently with targets for whole-school and faculty improvement to reinforce the key priorities for improvement at all levels. A particular priority must be the closing of gaps in the attainment and progress of students eligible for free school meals and that of their peers. These gaps, while narrowing, remain wide.

You have ensured that the governing body is much better informed about the performance of the school with your exceptionally clear reports to governors. These clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses of the school's performance with red, amber and green designations and helpful presentations of data. Governors as a consequence have been energised and enthused. Their work has been centred on restructuring the school's finances, staffing and buildings, and in building links with the community. The school's post-inspection action plan sets out a clear strategy for developing governors' effectiveness in checking on the quality of education.

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

- ensure that targets for students' achievement are sufficiently demanding
- ensure that gaps in achievement between students eligible for free school meals and others are closing quickly, by evaluating the impact of all improvement actions, and taking further action in and beyond the classroom based on best practice locally and nationally
- develop performance management of staff to link more coherently with school and faculty improvement targets, and sharpen the use of measurable success criteria in faculty planning and evaluation
- develop the capacity of governors to find out about the quality of teaching, learning, and pupil progress; and formalise the role for governors in regular evaluation of the school action plan.

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

External support

The school has made judicious use of a wide range of external support. The local authority's school improvement officer visits regularly to check on progress and to ensure that the school has access to support and advice. Consultants from the local authority have worked effectively with heads of faculty to sharpen the use of regular book scrutinies as a means of checking that students are making enough progress and are understanding how to improve. A team of external consultants has supported the sharp improvement in mathematics performance already evident from early GCSE results. Links have been established with a number of local schools to support aspects of leadership and governance.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- The lead inspector.