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17 October 2013

Carolyn Dickinson
Headteacher
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BN14 7AR

Dear Mrs Dickinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Worthing High School

Following my visit with Catherine Anwar, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Susan Thomas-Pounce, additional inspector, to your school on 15 and 16 October 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in December 2012. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The academy may appoint newly qualified teachers.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for West Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Farmer

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2012

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better in all subjects in Years 8 to 11 by:
 - planning lessons that take account of what students have learned before and which are matched to their different levels of ability
 - ensuring that teachers talk less in lessons so students have more time to be actively involved in learning
 - providing a variety of activities that offer greater challenge for students, especially higher-attaining students
 - improving the quality of teachers' marking so that students know what they need to do to improve and can meet their ambitious targets.
- Improve rates of progress in English and science in Years 8 to 11 by:
 - making sure teaching challenges students in these subjects, especially the highest-attaining students
 - ensuring students' skills in reading and writing are developed and promoted across the school.
- Improve overall standards of behaviour by:
 - making sure activities in lessons capture all students' interest so that behaviour in lessons improves
- ensuring that the school's procedures for managing behaviour are consistently applied by all staff.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management in driving forward improvement by:
 - developing the skills of leaders at all levels so they can make rigorous and accurate checks on the quality of teaching and take prompt and effective action to tackle any weaknesses
 - making sure that evaluative judgements about the quality of teaching are linked to students' progress
 - ensuring that governors hold the school to account for its priorities and performance.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 October 2013.

Evidence

Inspectors observed parts of 25 lessons and made brief visits to one or two other lessons. Six lesson observations were conducted jointly with school leaders. Inspectors also scrutinised a range of documentation, including information about students' current achievement, initial analyses of the 2013 unvalidated GCSE results, the updated action plans, performance management information and leaders' analyses of the quality of teaching. Meetings were held with the headteacher, groups of students, a parent governor, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, other leaders and teachers within the school. I also met with an external consultant commissioned by the governors to help the school improve.

Context

Since the first monitoring visit that took place in March 2013, several significant changes to staffing have taken place. The acting headteacher has now been appointed to the permanent position. Three new appointments have also been made to the position of deputy headteacher and the two posts of assistant headteacher respectively. Several staff have left the school and all existing vacancies have been filled.

Achievement of pupils at the school

GCSE results in 2013 have gone up since the inspection that took place in December 2012, with some pleasing gains across several subjects such as art, English literature, and information and communication technology. However, standards overall were disappointing, particularly in English language where results were lower than leaders' predictions. This, in turn, resulted in a shortfall in the predicted percentage of students securing five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics.

Nevertheless, the rate of progress made by students in lessons is accelerating across the school because the teaching in most subjects has improved. This is particularly true of science where teachers' focus on developing greater challenge in their teaching is resulting in improved levels of student motivation and better gains in their learning.

In English, there is still too much variability across year groups and teaching groups. This is reflected in the 2013 examination results which, although slightly improved when compared with the 2012 results, were below expectations and did not reflect the students' potential to achieve well in English when taking account of their attainment on entry to the school.

Gaps in the performance of different groups of students, such as those eligible for free school meals and the most-able students, are narrowing, but this area remains a priority for future improvement.

Students are clear about their targets and have a good understanding of how they can be achieved. Teachers are now placing a greater emphasis on developing students' reading and writing skills across all subjects. In lessons across several subjects, students were seen producing good pieces of written work, effectively supported by the teaching of the specific literacy requirements in that subject. Significant improvements were seen across the school in the marking of students' work. Teachers were observed correctly taking the time to require students to read out loud in class, and appropriate time was set aside in lessons for writing.

The quality of teaching

Students now have increased opportunities to work together. In the best lessons, teachers plan activities that encourage students to work more closely with their peers, for example in assessing each other's work. Students told inspectors that they particularly enjoy these activities which stimulate better engagement and a deeper understanding of the skills and knowledge that they need to acquire. However, they also accurately identified some inconsistency in the approaches taken by different teachers and across different subjects.

Teachers routinely plan lessons that are relevant, considered and well resourced. Consequently, many lessons are more interesting, varied and sometimes innovative. Most teachers now use a range of questions to stimulate discussion. However, in some lessons, the range of questioning strategies is more limited and does not always challenge students of different abilities.

Marking was in evidence across all subjects within the academy, and students say this has greatly improved. Inspectors saw evidence of high-quality feedback across most subjects, providing clear affirmation of the skills and knowledge that students have developed, with specific details of what they now need to improve. However, this is not universally the case. In some instances, the feedback is too general, with only comments about students' effort and insufficient detail of what worked well, what needs to improve and how.

Overall, teachers are making better use of information about students' prior attainment to plan lessons that broadly match their needs. However, in too many lessons, this information is not yet used well enough to tailor activities for students of differing abilities. In some lessons, students are given exactly the same work to do. In such circumstances, students of lower ability find the work too hard or those of higher ability are not sufficiently challenged. In the best lessons, teachers adapt

work carefully. For example, in a successful geography lesson, students of different abilities were given resources at varying levels of complexity. This meant that all students were able to explore the topic successfully, and all made good progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The academy provides a calm and purposeful environment which students value and respect. Students' behaviour is characterised by generally positive attitudes to learning; even on occasions when the teaching is dull, they are patient and compliant. Attendance continues to improve and students are punctual to lessons. Students spoke enthusiastically about the new behaviour policy, which meets with their approval. All described a 'crackdown' on behaviour, and the introduction of a rewards system which some considered overdue.

In line with the increased rates of attendance, incidents of disruption resulting in temporary exclusion from the academy have also reduced. This is because teachers now apply the behaviour policy more consistently and students are fully aware of the consequences of poor behaviour. However, students who are eligible for free school meals still have lower rates of attendance and higher levels of exclusion than other academy students.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders are determined to secure rapid improvements in teaching. They model high expectations at all times and observe teaching regularly and often. The feedback and support that teachers receive following these observations and the developmental targets they are given have led to improved performance in the classroom. Those who have been unwilling to meet leaders' high expectations have left.

Sensibly, the approach thus far has focused on planning and teaching lessons that promote better levels of engagement. Work to improve the quality of teaching must now develop teachers' capacity to ensure that the levels of challenge for students of different abilities within a class are equally high.

Subject leaders are committed to securing improvements and understand their accountabilities well. They are effectively supported by the headteacher and senior leaders within the academy, including those newly appointed, who have wasted no time in assessing what is yet to be achieved. Until now, subject leaders have correctly focused on the broad academy priorities identified at the last inspection. Work to improve the impact of all subject leaders must now focus on subject-specific improvements, based on rigorous self-evaluation, accompanied with training specifically tailored to the needs of each individual team member.

Senior leaders have accurately identified the reasons for the inflated and over-generous predictions in the 2013 GCSE English results. They have already initiated plans to link the English department with a department that has been judged good by Ofsted, to provide immediate training and opportunities for external standardisation of teachers' assessment across each year group within the academy. There are sensible plans, too, to support the subject leader who reports directly to the headteacher.

A rigorous external review of the governing body has taken place. Governors are now much clearer about their roles and ways in which the previous structure contributed to gaps in their working knowledge of the academy. A good-quality action plan has been drawn up and is being implemented. This includes a re-structure of the ways in which governors work and changes to the frequency of meetings. Governors are rightly unhappy about the inaccuracy of GCSE predictions presented to them by leaders in the past, particularly in English. They have undertaken training in data interpretation and are clear about how well the academy is achieving when compared to similar schools. Their expectations of leaders are high, including of those newly appointed to the leadership of the academy. They have wisely commissioned support from an external consultant to ensure that they gain an ongoing objective view of the effectiveness of academy leaders.

External support

Leaders fulfilled their commitment to joining the South Downs academy alliance shortly after the first monitoring visit. Since then, however, they have also decided to join the Millais teaching school alliance in order to access the top-rate learning opportunities for academy staff uniquely available to teaching schools.

Governors have wisely commissioned external consultancy for themselves and to support the headteacher, who is new in the role. A mentor has been secured in addition to an improvement adviser who reports directly to the governing body. The advisor's review of governance has already strengthened governance arrangements within the academy. Governors have also bought into the local authority service level agreement so that they can access support from the local authority where necessary.