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Dr Kevin Bawn
Headteacher
Clyst Vale Community College
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Dear Dr Bawn

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Clyst Vale Community College

Following my visit to your academy on 11 October 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 July 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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:

- add additional success criteria to the development plan which are linked to the performance of different groups of students
- ensure students are given tasks which they need to complete when work is marked.

Evidence

During the visit I met with you, your deputy and assistant headteachers, the chair of the governing body along with most governors, a group of subject leaders and a group of sixth form students. I evaluated the academy development plan which has been written in response to the areas for improvement identified during the inspection, as well as other documents including your analysis of the 2013 GCSE and A level examination results.

Main findings

You have taken appropriate actions to improve achievement in English. Students are now taught in ability sets in Years 10 and 11. Consequently work is better matched to the needs of the different ability groups and students are able to make better progress. In 2013 results for English language improved but they are still not as high as they should be given students' previous attainment. Nearly all students also take an English literature GCSE. Results from these show that students made good progress from their starting points and overall levels of attainment for literature are above average.

All students in Years 7 follow a 'read to learn' course. This includes opportunities for more able students to look at how language is developed as well as improving reading skills. Students are also encouraged to read for pleasure and be more analytical of their texts. The careful choice of texts has also supported improvements to the work of boys. Students in other years have additional support to improve their reading skills. Your literacy coordinator has worked well with subject departments to improve the quality of writing, such as supporting students to answer the longer essay questions in science.

You have a strong tradition of mainly entering students for GCSE examinations with a few vocational subjects. When considering results to GCSE examinations only students make good progress from broadly average starting points. Results from 2013 show a big increase in standards for students known to be eligible for free school meals with a reduction in the gap in standards between these and others. The gap in science and mathematics is around half a grade and, although higher in English, it is below that found nationally.

Lessons are now better matched to the needs of the different ability groups. You have ensured that staff have a better understanding of the levels at which students are working. You, and your senior leaders, frequently check how well staff are teaching and then identify any additional support needed for individual teachers. You have also arranged for staff to work in groups to support each other as well as to demonstrate good practice. You have rightly recognised that actions to help raise achievement for boys are based around good teaching. Subject leaders are taking more responsibility for improving the quality of teaching and learning within their departments but this is variable with some leaders being less confident and experienced than others.

You have worked with staff to improve teaching by getting them to think more about how they teach. In particular the emphasis on students developing and demonstrating independent and co-operative learning skills through a range of methods. The sixth form students said this helps them understand their work and is one of many reasons why they enjoy the academy. They also commented that they receive excellent support.

Marking has improved both in its detail and its frequency. Most staff follow the academy's expectations and some marking is highly informative in directing students in what they need to do to improve. However at times this does not give students a task to complete when they get books back and consequently it is not as effective.

Leaders and managers take greater responsibility to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers work is monitored so that any aspect of teaching which requires improvement is identified and then support is given to bring about the improvements. You have written a very clear development plan which identifies what needs to be done to bring about improvements. There are clear success measures but they do not identify specific groups; for example the standards for boys in English or for students for which the academy receives pupil premium money.

The governing body has gained in experience and confidence and has identified governors to work with particular subjects so they will have a better overview of progress and attainment information. Governors have also arranged for an external evaluation of the academy development plan and a review of leadership.

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

I will make further visits to support the English subject leader evaluate the impact of the various initiatives to improve the quality of English teaching and to raise achievement. I will support less confident subject leaders to improve their observation skills and to aid them in identifying how teaching may be improved. Once RAISEonline has been published I will support the governing body analyse the information to identify the academy's strengths and areas in need of improvement.

External support

The academy receives effective support through their school improvement partner and through external support from other local secondary schools.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Education Funding Agency, the Director of Children's Services for Devon and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector