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Mrs S Khan-Jones
Headteacher
Sandown Bay Academy
The Fairway
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Dear Mrs Khan-Jones

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sandown Bay Academy

Following my visit with Stephanie Matthews and Andrew Lyons, additional inspectors, to your academy on 1 and 2 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2013. 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.

The academy's action plan is now fit for purpose. However, having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures. I recommend that the academy does not seek to 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 academy's Management Improvement Board and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Yours sincerely
Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2013

- Eradicate inadequate teaching and increase the amount that is good by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan tasks to match the full range of abilities in their classes and adapt them, as necessary, during lessons to make sure that all students are challenged
 - manage behaviour well so that students are focused on their learning and no one is able to interrupt or disrupt the lesson
 - give students detailed and regular feedback on their work so that they know how to improve it
 - make sure that all lessons help students improve their written and spoken English.
- Raise achievement, especially in English and mathematics, so that all students make at least expected progress and gaps in achievement between different groups close, by:
 - closely monitoring students' performance to identify underachievement
 - rapidly giving support to those students who are in danger of underachieving
 - making sure lessons are fully staffed, especially in English, so that students are properly taught and there are no gaps in their learning, especially for those studying for GCSE.
- Secure the confidence of all students, and of their parents and carers, that the academy will prevent and tackle bullying effectively, by:
 - urgently reviewing anti-bullying policies and procedures
 - sharing policies with students and taking their views into account so that everyone clearly understands what is required and expected of them.
- Strengthen the way in which all leaders and governors improve teaching and drive up achievement by:
 - checking regularly that teaching is good enough and identifying where improvements are needed
 - providing guidance and support to teachers, including the chance to see the best teachers teaching
 - checking that teachers follow up advice and instructions given after lesson observations and act on these successfully so that students' achievement improves
 - holding teachers in all subjects strongly to account for the quality of their teaching and assessment and how well students achieve.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 October 2013

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Executive Principal, who represents the academy's sponsors, Academies Enterprise Trust (AET); the Principal and other senior staff; heads of faculty and subject leaders; groups of students; and a member of the management improvement board (MIB). There was also a telephone conversation with an adviser from Hampshire children's services, which is providing support to the island's schools. During the visit, 24 lessons were observed, many jointly with senior staff, and 10 other lessons were visited briefly. Two parents asked to speak with the lead inspector and they were each contacted by telephone.

Context

There was significant staff turnover at the end of the summer term. New heads of English, mathematics, languages, religious education and classics have taken up post. A new special educational needs coordinator has recently taken over responsibility for this area. Two members of the senior team left in the summer.

Achievement of students at the academy

Outcomes for students in the 2013 examinations showed improvement in some key measures from 2012 results. The proportion of students obtaining five or more good GCSEs including English and mathematics rose by 7%; more students made the expected amount of progress in English and in mathematics; and there was an important gain in the proportion obtaining a grade C or better in English. However, the academy's targets were missed by an appreciable extent. Too few students are making expected progress in Key Stage 3 in English due to previous staffing problems in that subject, and there remain significantly lower than average rates of expected progress in mathematics in some year groups. The English department is now fully staffed and the quality of learning in this subject is beginning to improve.

Although the performance of students eligible for the pupil premium was better in the 2013 examinations than in 2012, the gap between their performance and that of other students widened. Achievement in several vocational subjects was better than last year, especially at the highest levels, but some targets were not met. Results in some foundation subjects declined, including those in languages, religious education and classics. This contributed to a drop in the overall average point score and the capped average point score from 2012 figures.

Despite some well-targeted intervention and support strategies, some groups of students are still underachieving significantly. Some subjects still have very large gaps in achievement between boys and girls. The overall progress of disabled

students, and those with special educational needs, has not improved sufficiently: a substantial minority in each year group made very little progress last year in English and in mathematics. In contrast, those with autistic spectrum disorders, who are supported in The Cove unit, continue to make very good progress because of how well led this provision is, and the expertise of its staff.

Students in the sixth form continue to make adequate progress in their A2 and AS courses. In the 2013 examinations, there were strengths in some subjects, including chemistry and mathematics, but remaining areas of weakness in music, media and psychology. While the proportion obtaining the highest grades at A level increased in 2013, a handful of students left with no qualifications at all, which raises important questions about the appropriateness of their programme of study and the advice and guidance they received.

The progress made by students in lessons is too variable. Lesson observations show that students' progress can be rapid and secure where teaching is confident and behaviour is managed well, and where high expectations mean that work is set which offers appropriate challenges to all groups of students. In too many classrooms, however, progress remains less than good; as a consequence, gains in learning in some areas, especially in foundation subjects, are still slow and insecure.

The quality of teaching

Students speak of 'teaching changing' and teachers 'trying new approaches'. This is the result of well-focused support and intervention for staff whose teaching skills were weak. Middle leaders value the structured and systematic way in which this support is delivered, and feel that it makes them more able to intervene and promote improvement effectively.

Plans to bring about changes to senior management responsibilities around Easter and into the summer term meant that this aspect of the academy's work suffered from a lack of coordination and clarity of leadership for some time, preventing it having as strong an impact as would otherwise have been the case. Because senior leaders show very high levels of commitment to driving improvements in the quality of teaching, there are signs that lost ground is being made up this term. The proportion of teaching that is inadequate has decreased since the last inspection, but the rate of improvement in the proportion of good or better teaching has plateaued. The academy is aware that the pace of change must be accelerated in order to reach AET's targets.

Some middle leaders have usefully been allocated more time to spend monitoring and supporting teaching. However, too many judgements about teaching are still made on the basis of brief visits to lessons, by them and senior staff, rather than observations of a significant part of a lesson. The judgements of the quality of teaching and learning made by senior staff during the inspection were accurate but

some middle leaders' judgements of lesson quality would benefit from external validation; an external consultant is currently providing useful challenge and support in this respect. Judgements of the quality of teaching must also be considered carefully alongside indicators of students' progress.

Despite assessment practice improving, some lesson planning is poor and teachers struggle to maintain students' interest and engagement over 90 minutes, and allow for individual needs to be met consistently well. The academy is considering a reorganisation of the timing of lessons as part of a broader curriculum review this year. Some students in Year 11 are unconvinced of the usefulness of many lesson objectives provided at the outset of a lesson, reflecting a lack of awareness on the part of some teachers, both of academy policy, and of the opportunities that clear and straightforward learning outcomes offer for teachers to monitor and steer the quality of the learning taking place throughout lessons. Students' work is being marked better in many subjects, but there are still concerns from some parents and carers that homework is not reliably set by all teachers.

No clear common strategies to improve the standard of students' spoken and written English in lessons could be discerned in the lessons observed. When asked, students were unable to give any examples of ways in which the academy is attempting to secure improvements in these skill areas by, for example, common tactics used by all teachers, or special whole-academy opportunities. The academy's response to this important issue has been too slow. Instead of quickly putting in place simple, effective measures to support all teachers to address literacy issues, a literacy group was formed quite recently and has concentrated so far on formulating strategies which have not yet had any real impact in classrooms.

Behaviour and safety of students

Students speak of teachers 'tightening up' on discipline and enforcing higher standards of behaviour in lessons. They welcome this. Teachers have been trained in ways of monitoring and recording instances of poor behaviour, and there is a steady emphasis on ensuring that this is done consistently across the academy. However, students feel that practice is still inconsistent and are still sometimes aggrieved when better behaviour by challenging students is rewarded, and the quiet and cooperative students seem to go unnoticed. Behaviour is improving, but there remains much to be done to ensure that rewards and sanctions are applied consistently and effectively by all staff.

The consensus among students is that bullying has decreased in frequency and severity. However, too little has been done to raise the confidence of students and their parents and carers in the extent of the academy's response to this issue. A useful assembly on bullying was seen during the visit, and anti-bullying ambassadors, trained as part of a whole-island initiative, are now in place. However, little of this has been detected by students, who said that they were not aware of

any mechanism to involve them, or their parents and carers, in anti-bullying strategies. For example, some were surprised to learn that there is a page in the planner dedicated to explaining the academy's strategies and processes in this aspect of its work; it has obviously not been drawn to the attention of students by all tutors. This represents a significant missed opportunity to work in coordination and cooperation with students, and the local community, on a very important issue.

Attendance is improving, but is still low in some years and for some groups of students. Students eligible for the pupil premium in Year 11 still do not attend often enough and the academy must prioritise this as a matter of urgency if these students are to achieve well over the remainder of their time here. Rates of exclusion are still too high, but there is a healthy downward trend in all year groups as a result of a wide range of useful strategies now in place.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The lack of clarity in the roles of the senior team brought about by the planned restructuring last term caused progress in some key areas for improvement to falter. Some stability has since been restored, with support from the Executive Principal and the sponsors, and the pace of improvement has picked up again. As a result of AET intervention, the day-to-day management of the academy, various support mechanisms and improvement planning have all benefited from the Principal giving more rein to her senior team in the ways in which they carry out their responsibilities and exercise their initiative.

The academy's action plan was judged unfit for purpose at the last visit because it could not be used easily and effectively by AET and the MIB, to hold the academy to account. This has been improved now, and the plan is a useful tool to prioritise and monitor impact. However, the ways in which the Principal, the MIB and AET interpret action plan targets and interim measures are occasionally at odds with each other. For example, during the visit, explanations of the reasons for the academy failing to meet agreed achievement targets, stated clearly in all of the action plans, were convoluted. The Principal expressed that she felt that they were too ambitious because they were dependent on good attendance; it is unclear why, if this were the case, the targets stood, or why more was not done to improve attendance.

There has been a tendency so far to overload staff with new initiatives, ideas and required practices. For example, the 'red files' used by all staff, containing useful information such as students' prior achievements and expected grades, have some benefits but do not, of themselves, promote good practice; some staff remain unclear about their real purpose. Middle leaders felt overwhelmed last term by senior staff's demands of them, but they say that they are 'better listened to' now. They appreciate the new-found clarity in senior team roles, and value knowing who to approach about specific issues, and getting speedy, authoritative responses this term.

The MIB works closely with the academy staff and sponsors. There are others, effectively 'associate members', who usefully take on responsibilities for non-strategic aspects of the work. The MIB receives regular updates on the progress being made against the action plans. They agree that the turbulence around senior team roles last term caused the team to become unsettled, and they were relieved when the issue was resolved. Outcomes in 2013 being lower than targets was unexpected, and the MIB now understands the continuing need to track progress closely and ensure that more accurate forecasts are made of the achievement of all groups of students. They recognise improvements in the quality of teaching along the lines seen by the inspection team and credit the work of staff responsible. The MIB is not aware of the gap in perception between students and the academy in the strategies being used to reduce bullying. They believe that 'student voice' and students' involvement in these strategies is stronger and better developed than it is, indicating that they must acquire more first-hand evidence of the impact of the quality of responses to the key issues arising from the last inspection, and offer more challenge to the Principal and her senior team.

External support

The academy receives support from its sponsors AET, especially in English, mathematics and more recently, in improving the progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs. The Executive Principal oversees the work of this academy, and another on the island, and offers support and challenge to the Principal with regard to her leadership. Other support from AET is provided flexibly and on the basis of need. The sponsor's support is not, however, bringing about improvement that is sufficiently rapid and secure. The academy employs a consultant, whose work with senior and middle leaders, ensuring that judgements of the quality of teaching are valid and reliable, and reflect the academy's priorities, is having some useful impact.

Hampshire local authority is currently overseeing school improvement on the island and an adviser is taking an active interest in the progress and welfare of students in the academy. She has already met with the Principal, instigated various island-wide initiatives around attendance and the identification and provision of training needs, and is working with AET to meet particular needs such as governor training and the provision of other essential services to the academy. Hampshire local authority's support has the potential to be of significant benefit to students.

The following are priorities for further improvement.

- Ensuring rapid and secure improvements in the progress of all disabled students and those with special educational needs.
- Closing gaps in the achievement of various groups of students, especially those eligible for the pupil premium and other students, and between boys and girls.