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Mr Richard Cowper
Acting Principal
Ifield Community College
Crawley Avenue
Crawley
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Dear Mr Cowper

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ifield Community College

Following my visit to your school on 3 April 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 January 2014. 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 school should take further action to:

- make sure that governors act promptly upon the findings of the review of governance so that governors can further strengthen their role in moving the school towards good
- ensure greater consistency in the way teachers apply behaviour procedures and in the way teachers respond to students who ignore them
- ensure greater consistency in the way teachers use the student tracking system to establish a focused start to lessons.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, your senior leaders, and representatives from your staff, the Chair of Governors, a representative from the local authority and a group of students to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated your school improvement plan and went on a brief tour of the school with you and the school leader responsible for behaviour, visiting the modern foreign languages and science departments.

Context

A new principal has recently been appointed. He will take up the post from September 2014.

Main findings

The school's improvement plan focuses sharply on the areas identified in the previous inspection report. The plan appropriately specifies dates when leaders are scheduled to carry out checks. However the expected outcomes from these checks are not always included. When outcomes are outlined in the plan, many are not measurable, nor do they paint a clear enough picture of what the impact of the changes will be on the students. This makes it harder for you and your leaders to use the plan when judging whether the actions result in the improvements required.

A new Chair of the Governing Body, who has relevant experience and expertise, was appointed shortly after the last inspection. The governing body has rightly made changes to the way the committees are run in order to support greater scrutiny and challenge. These sensible adjustments are taking the governance of the school in the right direction. However it is too early to judge whether they are making the necessary improvements in the way that governors are holding the school to account. The governing body has carefully considered who it is going to commission, to undertake the review of governance, scheduled to start next term. It will be important that governors both ensure the review is carried out as soon as possible and act promptly upon its findings.

Teachers are beginning to use the system more widely to track students' progress and identify who needs extra help. Not all teachers, however, are consistently using it at the start of lessons to remind students of their most recent level and target. Since the previous inspection, the system has been suitably improved so that it includes individualised information on how ready the students are to learn. This is beginning to ensure that students are arriving at lessons more appropriately equipped.

The school's leaders have made apt and timely changes to the way they monitor and penalise students who persistently disrupt lessons. These developments are

beginning to improve the way students behave when they are learning. However, in some lessons, a small number of students are continuing to disrupt the learning of others. This is occurring mostly, but not solely, when teachers are not planning activities sufficiently well. Most teachers effectively follow the school's procedures for dealing with this kind of disruptive behaviour. Some teachers follow the procedures, but do not take strong enough action on the occasions when students disregard them and carry on misbehaving.

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

An adviser from the local authority has made frequent visits to support the school with the appointment of a new principal and writing the school improvement plan. However this plan still requires improvement. Until Easter the local authority has been rightly focusing its support on reviewing the school's needs and helping to appoint a new principal. As a result, their formal plan of support is scheduled to commence next term. It will be important that the actions outlined in the plan are carried out as quickly as possible. Leaders have sensibly visited local schools and ones that are further afield to see good practice. These visits are recent; the leaders who have benefited from them are prudently now reflecting and sharing with colleagues what they have gained from these visits.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector