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1 May 2014

Mrs Sue Hare (Executive Principal)
Headteacher
Eston Park Academy
Burns Road
Middlesbrough
Cleveland
TS6 9AW

Dear Mrs Hare (Executive Principal)

Special measures monitoring inspection of Eston Park Academy

Following my visit with Iain Veitch, Ofsted Secondee, to your academy on 29 and 30 April 2014, 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 third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in May 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.

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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that 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 Redcar and Cleveland.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Keeler
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good, particularly in English, humanities and languages, in order that students, including those known to be eligible for free school meals and those studying vocational subjects in the sixth form, make good or better progress, by:
 - ensuring that teachers routinely use assessment information to plan work which challenges all students at the right level
 - raising teachers' expectations of how much students can achieve in every lesson and during registration times
 - increasing the variety and pace of activities so that students are interested and engaged throughout lessons and during registration periods in order that students do not lose interest or cause disruption to the learning of others
 - providing students with regular, high quality written feedback so they know how to do better next time.

- Urgently strengthen leadership and management at all levels in order to bring about the necessary improvements in teaching and students' achievement by:
 - ensuring that no teaching is inadequate
 - involving all leaders and managers in regularly checking the quality of teaching, including the marking of students' work
 - ensuring that teachers are held to account for the impact of their teaching on students' achievement
 - identifying the training needs of teachers and providing high quality training to improve their skills
 - sharing the strengths of the good and outstanding teaching that exists in the academy more widely to help other teachers to improve their practice.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 29 to 30 April 2014.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy work, scrutinised documents and met with the Executive Principal, vice-principal/head of academy, representatives of the governing body and the academy sponsor. Discussions also took place with faculty leaders, the special educational needs co-ordinator and the Executive Principal Designate of the new Hillview Academy.

Context

Eston Park is due to amalgamate with the neighbouring Gillbrook Academy in September 2014. A joint governing body is in place to prepare for the transition. The Executive Principal Designate took up his appointment on January 1 2014 in order to oversee the move to the new academy. The amalgamation of the two academies and the uncertainty this has brought has made the retention of permanent staff extremely challenging. Since the previous inspection 59 staff have left the academy out of a total establishment of 72. As a result a high proportion of staff currently at the academy are on short-term contracts.

Achievement of pupils at the school

As a result of late targeted intervention in 2012/13, the percentage of students attaining five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, increased significantly. The current Year 11 has had a lot of ground to make up due to a legacy of under-achievement arising from ineffective teaching and low expectations. However, this cohort has made greater progress over the course of the year than their counterparts managed in 2010/13.

Students in Years 7 to 10 are also making better progress than they were when the academy was judged to require special measures. The gap in performance between students at Eston Park and those nationally is narrowing. The same can be said of students known to be eligible for free school meals in relation to their non-eligible peers. These developments are significant because they are testimony to the improvements in teaching and learning that have taken place since the previous inspection and give a clear indication that this is an improving academy. However, there is still room for further improvement. Year 7 students', particularly boys' progress in mathematics is not as good as it should be and achievement still needs to be higher in relation to many non-core subjects. Students with special educational needs are making better progress. This is because provision for special educational needs is well managed and tailored to students' particular learning needs, and work with external agencies is well co-ordinated so that students receive required support.

The quality of teaching

The momentum of improvement in the quality of teaching has been sustained despite significant staffing changes. There is a direct correlation between improved teaching and progress especially in the core subjects. The quality of teaching has improved noticeably over the past twelve months throughout the academy. An example of students benefitting from effective teaching can be seen in the well-managed English department. Here, teachers have high expectations and aspirations for their students. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and this is evident in the way they encourage students to be actively involved in their learning through challenging questioning, discussion and debate. Assessment is used to identify students' misconceptions which are quickly addressed through well-planned work. There is also a consistent focus on students' own use of language including punctuation and grammar. Students experience positive relationships with their teachers and the upbeat approach promotes positive attitudes to learning. Students enjoy their English lessons and it is clear to see why.

Positive developments have also taken place to improve provision in the non-core subjects but there remains work to be done if achievement is to rise further. Where students are not making good enough progress, it is because there is insufficient consideration given to developing skills and knowledge that increase in complexity as students move through each year group. Furthermore, whilst it is acknowledged that raising standards in literacy is a key strategy that will enhance students' achievement in all subjects, this will not happen until all faculties and all teachers fully contribute to this initiative. It should not be viewed as the sole remit of the English department, but rather an understanding that all teachers are teachers of English. It is important that senior leaders provide the professional development that will allow this to happen, especially as the transition to the new academy is completed.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour during break times and as students move around the academy is generally good. The previous inspection report referred to instances of restlessness leading to misbehaviour which disrupted the learning of others in the class. Instances of misbehaviour that influenced the learning of other students have certainly reduced and this was reflected in the lesson observations undertaken during the monitoring inspection. This was particularly evident where teaching was well planned and students were motivated and involved in their learning. A small minority of students find it difficult to work independently and also lack the skills necessary to be able to work effectively in group situations; this aspect of behaviour requires improvement.

Attendance is showing signs of improvement but persistent absence is still too high. It may well be worth senior leaders asking themselves whether there is a link between levels of attendance and the extent to which the planned curriculum meets learners' needs. In particular, are poorly-developed literacy skills linked to some students' disengagement with learning and school, coupled with the necessity to develop students' literacy skills further so they have the requisite tools to access learning in all subjects?

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The Executive Principal has been in post since the beginning of the autumn term 2013. From the outset the priority has been to raise standards of teaching and learning and it is clear that the quality of teaching is better than it has been for some considerable time although much still remains to be accomplished. The past academic year has not been without its challenges, but senior leaders have remained steadfastly focused on the improvement process. Difficulties have been compounded by an extremely high turnover of staff as the academy moves towards closure prior to the forthcoming amalgamation. The appointment of teachers on short-term contracts throughout the year has also brought challenges of continuity and adherence to established ways of working. Senior leaders have done well to 'keep the plates spinning' through these uncertain times and have succeeded in improving teaching and enhancing the progress of students. Also, staff have worked hard as they have increasingly risen to the challenge and come to recognise the need for improvement and for that they are to be commended.

Faculty leaders particularly in the core subjects are making a greater contribution to raising achievement. They have a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses within their faculties and are taking action to tackle them. They use data well to identify under-achievement and monitor teaching and learning closely. This represents a significant step forward.

The governing body is supportive of the work of senior leaders in bringing about improvement. Governors are equally keen to see Hillview Academy provide the highest possible standard of education. If this aspiration is to be realised governors accept that they need to develop their ability to hold senior leaders to account for the work they do. To this end they have commissioned training for all governors with immediate effect. Since the previous monitoring inspection plans have also been drawn up that will ensure that governors visit the academy to see provision on a much more regular basis. This is intended to help the governing body to monitor the work of the academy much more effectively.

The transition to the new Hillview Academy is proceeding well. The Executive Principal Designate has a clear and realistic view of the challenge that lies ahead and is determined to build on the work undertaken since September 2013 and this bodes well for the future.

External support

The sponsor is supporting the academy well. The capacity at senior leadership level has been enhanced through the deployment of key personnel. External consultancy and sponsor staff have been employed to good effect to improve teaching and learning. The early appointment of the Principal Designate has enabled the existing leadership to focus effectively on improving achievement and not be distracted by the issues relating to the transition to the new academy. This has proved a worthwhile strategy.