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Mr E Jackson
The Principal
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Dear Mr Jackson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sandown Bay Academy

Following my visit with Hugh Betterton and Raye Allison-Smith, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 20 and 21 May 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 fourth 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.

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 before the next monitoring inspection.

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 Board, the Education Funding Agency, the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education, 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 20 and 21 May 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal and other senior staff, members of the Management Board including the Chair who represents the sponsors Academies Enterprise Trust (AET), and groups of students. There was also a telephone conversation with a representative from Hampshire Children's Services which is providing support to schools on the island. During the visit 30 lessons were observed, the majority jointly with senior staff, and 14 other lessons were visited briefly.

Context

There have been no significant changes in the academy since the previous inspection visit.

Achievement of students at the academy

Achievement is improving steadily in all year groups. The academy's forecasts of examination outcomes for Year 11 in 2014 are now based on better quality assessment information, and they indicate an increase in the proportion of students achieving five or more good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, to near the national average. This is a result of better teaching and the wide range of interventions and special support opportunities in place to counter the impact of previously less effective teaching. Achievement in mathematics is expected to be similar to last year, but both the attainment and the progress of students in English are set to improve. The proportions of students achieving grade C or better in a humanities subject, a grade C or better in a language, and two or more grade Cs in science, are also set to rise.

Students' achievements in Years 7 to 10 are also improving as a result of better teaching. The relatively weaker achievement of students at Key Stage 3, especially in English due to staffing difficulties in the past, is still evident, especially in Year 9, but it is being addressed. Students eligible for additional government funding, known as pupil premium, are now making better progress. The gap between them and their peers in the proportion achieving five good GCSEs including English and mathematics is set to shrink by around 10% in 2014. Such attainment gaps are also reducing in both English and mathematics in other year groups. This is evidence of the academy's better use of its systems to track students' achievements to drive more effective targeted support and intervention strategies from Years 7 to 13.

Students' reading skills, and the quality of their spoken English, are improving due to the considerable emphasis on the development of literacy in the academy. Although obvious in history, English and language lessons, impact is not yet apparent in some other departments, including in mathematics and science.

Disabled students or those who have special educational needs are now set to make better and more consistent progress due to a reorganisation of the work of this area. Staff are now aligning provision with much more precision to generate specific outcomes, and beginning to gauge the impact of their work in terms of students' better progress.

Students' achievements in the sixth form are steadily improving. Outcomes in A and AS levels and work-related courses for 2014 are expected to be broadly in line with previous years, due to consistently better teaching for these year groups.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving: more is now good and very little is inadequate. This is because leaders have set up good systems to gauge the quality of all aspects of teaching, and they use them well. A range of evidence is now taken into account, including from formal observations of lessons, shorter and more frequent visits to classrooms, and analyses of the progress being made by teaching groups regularly over the year. The subsequent analyses of strengths and remaining weaknesses across departments and individual staff give the academy the capacity to identify the training needs of staff, with greater precision. Responses are timely, firm and effective. Despite this, too few staff are consistently planning to offer challenge and support to all groups of students in every lesson yet; too often the same work is presented to all students regardless of their ability. This issue is allied to some teachers still failing to gauge regularly the extent to which students understand the work, through questioning and other means, and then responding by continually reshaping the learning.

The quality of marking and feedback on students' work is improving across the academy. Some teachers are now using marking effectively and efficiently to steer improvements in students' work; others are still failing to realise its full potential, but are still providing useful feedback more reliably. The sheets on which teachers and students record their views about learning are potentially useful, but too often there is a lack of detail in the student comment section, indicating that the reflection has not been rigorous or useful.

Some teaching is now enabling students to understand how they may improve the sophistication and precision of their writing. There is more writing at length, and with a clearer sense of the relevant style, in many subjects, and work is often better organised in books. Students' speaking and listening skills are also developing in many areas. Where the development of these skills is not woven strongly into the learning, it is often because some teachers are not yet convinced that they all are, as the academy policy states, 'teachers of literacy'.

Teaching in the sixth form continues to be stronger than in the rest of the academy. It drives achievement securely, offers intellectual challenge and supports good levels of motivation and aspiration for higher education.

Behaviour and safety of students

Students move about the site calmly and cheerfully. There are now fewer instances of inappropriate behaviour. Students feel that there is a calm and respectful atmosphere in the academy and that, while there is still some bullying, it is infrequent, usually friendship-based, and addressed by staff effectively. Students are accepting of others from different backgrounds and with different outlooks, and many said that they would be relaxed about their friends being gay or lesbian.

In lessons, the vast majority of students continue to show interest in their work and value for learning. Some lack the confidence to challenge their or their friends' understanding of the work, or to speak up to contribute an answer that may not be entirely correct or an idea that may not be relevant, but there is nearly always a sense of students' willingness to listen and work hard in classrooms. Students are pleased that staffing levels are more consistent and say that they get more work done now in any lessons that need to be covered by a supply teacher. Instances of permanent exclusion are now rare. The proportion of students receiving fixed term exclusions is still high, but it is falling; senior leaders in the academy are well aware of the need to reduce them further as a priority.

Overall attendance has steadied, and remains slightly below the national average. Attendance in Year 9 is an issue, but the academy is well aware of the need to improve it and has made changes to the curriculum structure to help. The attendance of some groups of students, including those targeted for specific challenge and intervention in Year 11, is good and is a reflection of how well supported they feel by staff. Students remain punctual for lessons despite the distances they have to walk sometimes.

Students associated these improvements in behaviour and safety closely with the influence of the Principal, and improvements in the quality of teaching.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The Principal continues to show a quiet and very firm determination to bring about the improvements required. He does so skilfully, and the impact of his strong leadership is apparent across the academy. Other senior leaders are now working better as a team; previous changes to responsibilities have now stabilised, and they are working more coherently and effectively together. There are clearer expectations of their impact on achievement, attendance and other outcomes for students.

The most effective middle leadership, in departments such as in English, languages, design and technology, humanities and performing arts, is beginning to use the tools being developed by senior leaders to drive improvements in teaching and in students' achievements in their own areas to good effect. Many are starting to relish having direct and significant influence over the quality of work in their subjects, and are responding well to the higher levels of accountability for outcomes. However,

there remain some areas where any improvements are still largely driven by senior staff, including in art, science and physical education.

There are more strong and assertive responses to whole-academy issues now. For example, the strategy to improve students' standards of literacy, specifically their reading and speaking skills, is driven well. There are literacy champions in each department, and teaching and learning briefings now focus on giving teachers practical strategies to use. The 'talk the talk' initiative is designed to improve everyone's awareness of the need to be able to communicate ideas in a clear, confident and articulate manner. Regular monitoring is undertaken of the effective delivery of these initiatives in classrooms as a part of the more systematic approach taken to visiting lessons and gathering good quality information about the quality of teaching and learning.

The leadership of the sixth form remains a strength. There is a good range of good courses on offer that meets students' needs well. Genuine ambition for students continues and currently 13 have applied for medical and veterinary courses. There is more foundation level access planned from September 2014, and provision for supporting those who do not have good passes in GCSE English or mathematics is in place.

Governance continues to provide good levels of challenge and support to the Principal and other senior staff. Meetings are focused on the key priorities in the development plan and there is keen attention given to exploring aspects of the academy's work in depth. For example, current rates of progress in Year 10 were subject to very thorough scrutiny at the last meeting before being accepted as meeting targets. The academy's development planning remains well focused, and thorough and honest self-evaluations are undertaken regularly. These strongly support the capacity of the management board to hold the academy to account.

External support

The academy continues to benefit from the support of its sponsors, AET, specifically for mathematics, English, literacy and strategic leadership, but also in assisting with the organisation of provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs, and those whose personal circumstances mean that they need additional support. AET also provides good quality challenge and support through the work of the academy improvement partner, and expert advice regarding human resources, financing and a range of other services.

Further support for teaching, learning and the curriculum is provided by Hampshire local education authority. This is of very high quality, and the academy values its involvement in the emerging local subject networks and support groups being established on the island, and the assistance given by Hampshire with brokering fruitful links with other schools, including with two Hampshire-based teaching alliances, ETC and Pioneer.

The Principal orchestrates all of this support strongly and confidently, and also draws on the assistance of specific consultants. Useful links are also being made with other schools on the island, such as Ryde Academy and Carisbrooke College, involving sharing good practice and widening the opportunities staff have to work with others to support their professional development.