

Tribal
Kings Orchard
One Queen Street
Bristol
BS2 0HQ

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0117 311 5359
Email: christina.bannerman@tribalgroup.com

29 September 2014

Mrs J Anslow
Headteacher
Woodlands Community College
Minstead Avenue
Harefield
Southampton
SO18 5FW

Dear Mrs Anslow

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Woodlands Community College

Following my visit to your school on 29 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. I was grateful for the help your deputies gave me, and for the time they made available to discuss the actions being taken 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 June 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:

- complete the re-evaluation the school's strengths and weaknesses, and rewrite the development plan so that it says what needs doing much more directly and straightforwardly
- support better monitoring and evaluation, including by governors and middle leaders, by including more interim measures of success in the development plan
- concentrate on monitoring the achievement of separate groups of students, and use this information to reflect on implications for teaching and the curriculum
- improve achievement in mathematics and science as a matter of urgency, by improving students' grasp of key ideas and skills.

Evidence

Because of your absence from school at the time of the visit I met with both deputy headteachers, and I also met with representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I scrutinised and evaluated the school's self-evaluation and development planning documents. I briefly visited a number of lessons around the school, with senior staff, to see teaching and learning.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection the school has begun a thorough reappraisal of its strengths and weaknesses. It is now in a much better position to see what needs to improve, and to bring about the necessary changes. Elements of previously optimistic judgments of the quality of teaching and learning are still evident in the school's self-evaluation, however. There is talk of 'continual improvement', despite little ground having been gained in the overall progress being made by students; there is still a tendency to explain low levels of achievement in terms of students' backgrounds, and changes to examination systems. But there is a refreshing and new sense of honesty apparent this term, which gives the school a better capacity to face up to what needs doing.

The school's development plan identifies broadly the right priorities but gives too little detail about specific actions to be taken in several areas, when and by whom, and how success will be gauged in the short, medium and long term. Your two deputies are keen to begin work on improving it in the light of this visit.

Examination outcomes in 2014 were disappointing, and were a shock to the school. The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C or better, including in English and mathematics, fell dramatically. The improving trend in students' achievements in English was maintained, but achievement in several other subjects, especially mathematics and science, fell to unacceptably low levels. Your deputies show a clear understanding of what needs to be different in students' learning and they have already begun to put plans in place to generate improvement. There is still a sense that students, particularly the more able, should be moved through work quickly and, if possible, receive early GCSE recognition for this. We discussed the benefits of building in more opportunities for all students to acquire a much deeper understanding of key concepts and to increase the sophistication of their knowledge and skills. This would enable them to develop a much more secure grasp of key concepts, as well as some really challenging aspects of topics.

Students in the lessons we visited showed a willingness to learn. We agreed that they are ready to work with teachers in the process of trying different approaches to

teaching and learning. At the same time, they must be supported to acquire better learning skills, gain in confidence in challenging their own understanding, and become more ambitious for their level of achievement in each subject. The reworked system of reward stamps to recognise students' meeting expectations is successful; it serves to highlight any deliberate lack of cooperation from individual students as exceptional and unacceptable.

Students' achievements in each subject are measured and analysed often. However there is a tendency to look at overall achievement at the expense of checking how well each group of students is doing. This reduces the opportunities for subject leaders and teachers to see in enough detail what needs to be done differently, and better, and to adapt their teaching accordingly. This is particularly true for students with disabilities and special education needs supported at school action plus (under the previous code of practice), and students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Attendance improved over 2013/14 as a result of successful work with some families of students who were persistently absent. The local authority has recently begun to support the school better in this, including taking appropriate cases to court. More remains to be done to bring attendance to a good level. The school is reviewing its approach to the poor attendance of a small group of students who face significant difficulties in their personal circumstances. The rate of fixed term exclusions has dropped.

The Governing Body has undertaken the review of governance required following the last inspection. It has not yet received the report so has not had opportunity to formulate a response. There is already, however, a better understanding from some that governors have to be much more challenging around the impact of the school's work to drive up outcomes for students rapidly, and to monitor this much more frequently. To this end, governors know that they have to be very well informed about the degree to which specific targets are being met each term, and hold senior staff to account much more assertively.

External support

Since the previous inspection the school has improved its links with three local teaching schools. The majority of support comes from the Wilden Teaching School Alliance, and other support is drawn from Bitterne Park Teaching Alliance and Thornden Teaching Alliance. More thorough processes are now in place to assure senior staff of the quality of teaching and learning and staff from these schools are taking part in lesson observations and working with the school to help with this.

Before the recent inspection the school was working with Academies Enterprise Trust (AET), preparing to become part of this group of schools. In the event, this did not happen, and the school did not become an academy. During this time the local

authority did not visit the school, and was providing no support for teaching and learning. Since the inspection support from the local authority has begun, and is now of good quality. The new link adviser has already been working with the mathematics department, and has plans to support science and to work with the school on lesson observation strategies.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector