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30 September 2014

Mr Rob Corbett
Principal
Ifield Community College
Crawley Avenue
Crawley
RH11 0DB

Dear Mr Corbett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ifield 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. 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 third 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 not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- make sure all the governors' attention is dedicated to challenging and supporting the school
- ensure that senior leaders make more effective use of the information they have on students' progress to hold middle leaders to account for gaps in the achievement of different groups
- make sure teachers are using the information they have on students' progress when planning lesson activities and posing questions.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, your senior and middle leaders, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority

to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. You accompanied me on short visits to classes in English, mathematics and science as well as one art class.

Context

The new principal joined the school September 2014 along with a new head of science and acting head of mathematics.

Main findings

This third visit was undertaken to review the school's progress on some key recommendations made following my last visit. The areas previously identified as requiring rapid development have not improved sufficiently.

In the short time you have been at the school you have started to make appropriate changes but it is too early to see their impact on students' progress. The school improvement plan is unfinished. You are right to make sure you have properly evaluated the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, the plan provides crucial information which governors and leaders need in order to check whether actions taken are making enough of a difference.

GCSE results dropped this year. The proportion of students achieving 5 good GCSE grades including English and mathematics fell to below the national minimum expectations. The school's own predictions for GCSE results in 2014 were not accurate. The way middle leaders make predictions in their subject areas is not effective.

Teachers have easy access to information which summarises the progress their students are making. However they are unclear about how to best use it in their planning and questioning. For example, in mathematics classes, the answers some students gave to questions posed were too readily accepted by the teacher and some weak answers were over praised. Several students who would have benefited from answering questions were not prompted to do so.

Some senior leaders have an over positive view of the quality of teaching in the subjects they manage. They have been too trusting of what subject leaders have told them. In a number of subjects there are significant gaps between the achievement of boys and girls. When senior leaders judge the quality of teaching they do not take enough account of the gap in progress between different groups of students.

The Chair of Governors is establishing links with a governing body from a local school. Despite this collaboration being in its early stages, it is helping governors to understand what constitutes effective governance. The governing body's focus on

improving achievement is being impeded by governors not working effectively together. Some governors are spending more time and energy resolving issues within the governing body rather than in the school. Steps are being taken to change this, including the appointment of an associate governor.

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

The local authority has supported the school to improve modern foreign languages and has provided training through a local teaching school. A mentor, who is the headteacher of a school which has moved from requiring improvement to good, has been identified to help you. I have asked the authority to help middle leaders in developing sharper evaluation skills. I previously asked the authority to link the governors to an effective governing body in a secondary school. This link has only just been established. It is imperative that the local authority promptly provides governors with the support and guidance they need to become more effective. The authority should carefully monitor the work of the governing body to ensure the support provided leads to rapid improvements.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector