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15 May 2015

Mrs Jane Hadlow
Headteacher
Castle Community College
Mill Road
Deal
CT14 9BD

Dear Mrs Hadlow

Special measures monitoring inspection of Castle Community College

Following my visit with Matthew Newberry Her Majesty's Inspector, and Elizabeth Smith and David Webster Additional Inspectors to your school on 13 and 14 May 2015, 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 March 2014. 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 school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint NQTs.

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 Kent.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2014

- Significantly improve the quality of teaching across all subjects by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have higher expectations of what students can achieve
 - regularly set work that challenges and extends the students' skills, especially their skills in writing
 - apply the college's policy on marking.
- Raise the achievement of all groups, especially boys, the most-able students and those supported by additional funding, particularly in English and mathematics, by:
 - consistently providing students with work that meets their needs and challenges their knowledge and understanding
 - refusing to accept work that is poorly presented and is clearly below the students' ability levels
 - ensuring work is properly marked and that the students are given precise written feedback on what has been done well, what could be improved and how.
- Significantly improve behaviour, especially at the Mill Road site, in lessons and around the building to ensure that boisterous behavior in corridors is eliminated and that classroom learning is not disturbed by the poor conduct of a significant minority of students. Ensure that all staff apply the college's policy on behaviour management.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels, including governance, by:
 - rigorously checking the progress of all student groups by ensuring that the available performance data are accurate and fit for purpose and can be readily used by teachers to help with their planning for learning
 - improving the process by which the quality of teaching and learning is monitored
 - ensuring that the curriculum provided adequately meets the needs of all students, especially the more able
 - ensuring that governors are more effective in holding senior staff to account for the college's performance.

An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the college's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken to assess how this area of leadership can be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 13 and 14 May 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim Principal and other senior leaders. Inspectors met with the sponsor designate and conducted a phone conversation with the Chair of the Governing Body. The lead inspector also met other representatives of the governing body and a group of parents. Inspectors met with a group of teachers who have varying lengths of service. Inspectors met with groups of students informally. The lead inspector met with representatives from the local authority. Inspectors examined a wide range of information about the academy such as information about students' achievement.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection a few members of staff have left the academy. Most have been replaced but temporary leadership arrangements remain in place for mathematics and science. The academy did not transfer to the SchoolsCompany Trust on 1 April 2015 as planned. No formal agreement has yet been reached between the SchoolsCompany Trust and the Education Funding Agency (EFA) about the proposed sponsorship of the academy. The interim Principal has, therefore, not yet been confirmed as the permanent principal of the academy. No formal agreement has been reached about the proposed accommodation arrangements for 2015–2016. The academy's leaders have proposed to the EFA that for one year only, they maintain the current working arrangements on both Salisbury Road and Mill Road sites. Agreement has been reached that building work will begin in the academic year 2015–2016 under the government's Priority Building Schools Programme (PSBP). Leaders have provided evidence that the current arrangements are less likely to impede the academy's progress than the suggested relocation of the staff and students at Mill Road to Salisbury Road by external agencies.

The academy's rate of progress out of special measures has been slowed. This is partly due to uncertainty about the sponsorship of the academy moving forward. Senior leaders are too frequently distracted from working to improve teaching and learning. For example, recently leaders have had to prepare extensive documents for external agencies about the academy's finances, building plans and the employment terms and conditions of many of the staff.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Progress in many subjects and in many classes has slowed. For example, in mathematics four out of ten Year 11 classes are not on-track to meet the government's floor target of expected progress for each pupil from Key Stage 2–4. Currently the school estimates that only 40.2% of Year 11 will achieve five good

GCSEs with English and mathematics. These forecast results are based on examinations already taken, external verification, comparisons with results in other schools locally, and controlled assessments in science. They are, however, better than for those in Year 11 in 2014. In English, for example, many more students than last year have made expected progress already. Similarly more students are on-track to attain greater success in all of their qualifications than those in Year 11 last year. This is because the academy rightly enters them for vocational subjects which are better suited to their career choices. The whole curriculum, including that available post-16, is evolving to better prepare students for the next stage of their education, work or life with subjects like these. Leaders constantly check that qualifications offered count in the government's performance league tables as well as meet the needs of all students.

Achievement is improving in subjects where teachers regularly mark students' work, according to the academy's policy. This is because teachers are able to assess quickly any gaps in students' knowledge and skills. They can re-set work which better challenges students or supports them to move on in their learning.

Disadvantaged students are currently well behind their classmates and other students nationally. Boys are currently achieving much less well than girls. These patterns are repeated in Years 10 and 9. This is often because teachers still do not have high enough expectations of what middle attaining or more able students can achieve. Disabled students and those with special educational needs are, though, doing much better. Many are catching up with their classmates as a result of well-managed interventions. Lower attaining students have benefitted from Year 7 'catch-up' funding (additional money from the government) and are improving their reading and writing more quickly. Support for their learning is stronger than for middle attaining students or those more able. Consequently the achievement of students has improved since the last inspection but still has serious weaknesses.

The quality of teaching

Previously seen improvements to teaching have not been sustained. Information provided by the school suggests that about half of the teaching is less than good and some of it remains inadequate. Inspectors agree with this evaluation. Some parents also expressed concern about the impact of frequently changing teachers, particularly in core subjects such as English and mathematics at Key Stage 3. This is despite considerable effort from senior and progress leaders to support teachers, provide training, check performance and to offer good models for them to use. The impact of the lead practitioners has been less effective than the academy first thought because a significant minority of teachers are only very slowly improving their practice and a few are making no changes at all.

A growing number of recently appointed staff are ambitious for the academy and are keen to improve their performance. Many of them asked inspectors for

developmental feedback on lessons observed. Information was also seen which shows real commitment by many to attending additional training sessions. Others have given up their own time in vacation periods and at weekends to make up for the shortcomings in teaching earlier in the year. Students appreciate this enormously, as do parents. Some teachers have gone to considerable lengths to fill gaps in students' knowledge or skills caused by weak teaching earlier in their time at the academy. This is highly commendable.

There remains too much variability in the quality of teaching. The inconsistency observed in previous monitoring inspections has not reduced despite the large number of additional, experienced colleagues working with the academy. Up to now, leaders' approach has been to support all teachers. They are rightly considering replacing this strategy with one that challenges weak performance more robustly. Leaders have access now to very detailed information about the progress of students in each teacher's class. Currently this provides a disappointing impression overall but gives a sharp picture of where radical action is now required. Leaders acknowledge that failure to act now will jeopardise the improvements that have been seen in the last year and could result in a prolonged period of special measures. Currently teaching is not good enough to cause the necessary acceleration of all students' progress.

Not all teachers are using information about students' achievement to plan their lessons. Sometimes this is because centrally-held performance data is over-complicated. Consequently, some students are still not receiving work that is hard enough. Others are struggling to understand what the teacher wants them to do.

Behaviour and safety of students

The conduct of students remains good. This was severely tested by the inadequate operation of the emergency evacuation alarm which disrupted an examination, learning and the organisation of the academy on day two of this inspection. Students remained, for the most part, calm, well-ordered and compliant with academy procedures. This is due to leaders' insistence that all teachers insist on these high standards. Inspectors observed a few instances of low level disruption. These were mainly dealt with effectively. However, inspectors did not see all students converting this good conduct into sustained and positive attitudes to learning. In the majority of lessons, students responded appropriately to teacher's instructions. In drama they co-operated very well to produce impressive puppets for use in an improvised play. This high level of enthusiasm was also seen in a Year 7 mathematics lesson. Challenging and differentiated extension work encouraged probing questions from the students.

Students, and some of their parents, reported that the behaviour of a small minority of students on the Mill Road site still disrupts learning from time to time. This is usually the case when teaching is not good enough or when a minority of teachers

do not enforce the academy's high expectations about behaviour. It is made worse with temporary teachers in some classes, particularly in mathematics and English.

Attendance rates have slipped back to a level that is below an acceptable threshold for an academy of this type. On day two of the inspection, for example, less than 90% of Year 10 was present.

Fixed-term exclusion rates continue to fall and there have been no permanent exclusions in the last year. The academy's arrangements for managing behaviour are strong. Better, more reasonable, use is being made of the academy's internal inclusion unit, the Phoenix Centre, than at the last monitoring inspection. The short term provision acts much more successfully as a deterrent. The longer term provision is being used effectively to avoid fixed term exclusions from school and help some students re-integrate into mainstream classes.

Students and parents agree that the pastoral care of the academy is highly effective. Students are cared for well and know exactly who to go to when they face problems. Bullying is dealt with robustly, even when it occurs online, outside school hours.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The interim Principal remains tireless in her commitment to the school. She is fully supported by the sponsor designate and the Chair of the Governing Body. Representatives of the local authority are clear that the academy is in a more secure position under her leadership than previously. The interim Principal has a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy. She is currently addressing weaknesses in teaching, challenges in the finances, the poor standard of accommodation on both sites and a range of personnel issues among staff. Just in the short period of this inspection, she had to act decisively to close the Salisbury Road site due to the faulty emergency evacuation alarm, infestation of the examination hall by pigeons and a number of sudden staff absences. She remained upbeat and positive throughout.

Senior leaders share some of the management burden. Through high level coaching, they are becoming more effective in their roles. Many of them are new in post in the current academic year. There is a lack of experience among the team on which the interim Principal can draw though this is matched admirably by senior leaders' total commitment, clear ambition for the students and boundless energy. All of the leadership team are held back in delivering their own work. This is because they need to cover for weaker middle leadership. There are gaps in the middle leadership of the core subjects. This means that some subject teams remain reliant on external support or senior leaders. In some cases, teachers are not held robustly to account for the quality of their work at middle leader level. Some teachers, therefore, have limited access to subject specialists who can provide advice and guidance. Too few

have been able to get such advice from further afield and as a result practice has not improved rapidly.

Governors are very supportive of the academy. The new committee structure means that more direct lines of accountability have been put in place. It is too soon to say what the lasting impact of this will be. The sponsor designate is clear that the local governing body will remain in place once agreement is reached with the EFA over the strategic leadership and management of the academy. The scheme of delegation will ensure that governors, too, will be held more closely to account for their impact. They will be required to hold the academy itself to account for the quality of its work in all areas.

External support

SchoolsCompany Ltd continues to provide strong support to the academy. The local authority is also contributing expertise which is helping to drive improvements. In particular, the local authority provides regular checks on progress in the academy. It uses observation and analysis of information about students' achievement to assist this process. One of its team performs many of the functions of a traditional school improvement partner. The local authority willingly provides this support because it is determined to ensure that there is a good or better secondary school to serve the community of Deal. It is working in an effective partnership with SchoolsCompany Ltd to make this happen. The governors now have to judge carefully how much more support is required and for how long. The present arrangements are unsustainable given the projected shortfall in the budget. A more cost-effective solution is required. All of the team around the academy is clear that the long term future of the academy depends on all leaders improving their practice and all teachers improving their performance. At present, the academy has a number of weaknesses in both.

There are two priorities for further improvement:

- Immediate resolution of the academy's sponsorship.
- Urgent clarification of the medium and long term financial position.