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Joy Ballard
Principal
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Dear Ms Ballard

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ryde Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 17 November 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good academy.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders, the Chair of the Local Governing Body and a representative from Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I met a group of pupils, briefly visited a number of lessons around the academy to see teaching and learning and looked at some pupils' work. I evaluated a range of documents, including the academy's improvement plans.

Context

Since the monitoring inspection which took place in January 2015, there have been considerable changes to the leadership and staffing of the academy. The Principal and two vice-principals left the academy, along with 21 teachers. Following the departure of the Principal in February, an interim head of school and an executive principal led the academy until the end of August 2015. A new vice principal joined the academy in June and the leadership team was restructured. In September, a new Principal, vice-principal and 15 new teachers joined the academy, including a new mathematics subject leader. The academy is now fully staffed.

Main findings

Following the first monitoring inspection in January, Academies Enterprise Trust acted decisively to change the leadership of the academy. After the departure of the Principal, the interim head of school and executive principal moved swiftly to stabilise the academy and raise staff morale. This leadership team improved the systems in the school for checking the quality of teaching and how well pupils are progressing. Senior leaders used this information to provide training designed to address weaknesses in teaching. The trust worked productively with leaders by providing expertise to help teachers improve their skills, for example to support pupils with special educational needs. This built on the sound work already in place to better meet the needs of some vulnerable pupils, including children in the care of the local authority. Careful checking of their progress followed by flexible responses by school staff have helped these pupils make faster progress.

After you were appointed to the post of Principal, officers from the academy trust and interim leadership team worked closely with you during the four months before you took up your appointment. Together, you recruited new leaders with relevant prior experience and promoted staff within the academy who showed potential to senior and middle leadership roles. This collaboration enabled you to create a leadership team well prepared to drive rapid improvement. Their actions will need to demonstrate clear impact in order for the academy to be judged good at its next inspection.

Since you joined the academy in September, you have made an immediate impact. Building on the steps taken by the interim leadership team you have led a transformation of the culture within the academy. Pupils and staff are clearly enjoying working within the collaborative ethos which pervades the academy. During my visits to classrooms, the atmosphere was purposeful and pupils were appropriately involved in a range of activities. It was clear that the pupils knew what was expected of them during the lessons. No low-level disruption was observed.

The improvements made by the interim leadership team were too late to prevent a drop in the unvalidated 2015 GCSE results. You are acutely aware that the need to

raise GCSE results is an urgent priority. Leaders are now meticulously tracking the progress of current Year 11 pupils in each subject and planning interventions to meet their learning needs. Since September, there have been rapid improvements in standards in English and achievement in mathematics is beginning to accelerate.

Since the monitoring inspection in January, leaders have rightly concentrated on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Senior and subject leaders are regularly checking that teaching is improving. This monitoring has shown increased rigour since September. Where weaknesses in teaching are identified, leaders devise individual training plans. Well-targeted coaching takes place and you are now checking carefully that it has been effective. It is too early for this training programme to show significant impact on pupils' achievement but most teachers are developing their skills and teaching in the academy is improving. Evidence in books shows that the academy's marking policy is being used more consistently and, as a result of useful feedback, the standard of pupils' work is improving across a range of subjects.

Leaders have acted decisively to improve behaviour and attendance. Your new senior leader with responsibility for behaviour and attendance refreshed the academy's behaviour for learning policy, which led to systems being used more consistently and effectively. Pupils reported that incidents of poor behaviour during lessons have declined, although there remain a small number of pupils who do not behave well enough. You are aware of this group and have appropriate plans to tackle this. As a result of improved behaviour, the number of fixed term exclusions issued to pupils has declined significantly after being far too high. In partnership with your attendance officer, you strengthened communication with parents and introduced a number of incentives for pupils to attend more regularly. Attendance is now rising rapidly.

In order to improve the accuracy of teachers' assessments, teachers have graded pupils' work alongside teachers in another local AET academy. Their practice has been further checked by trust and local authority advisers. You have used external testing programmes to verify the reliability of your own performance data. Your latest progress data shows that the current Year 11 pupils are on course to make considerably better progress than last year's cohort. When you have gathered and analysed secure performance information, which shows how well younger pupils are learning, you will be better placed to evaluate the impact of your training programme on other year groups. Leaders are not yet taking full account of trends in pupils' achievements to judge the effectiveness of teaching. They are understandably keen to acknowledge where teachers' practice is developing. However, this is leading them to be over generous in their evaluation of the quality of teaching in the academy.

In response to the inspection in October and this summer's low GCSE results, you have written a range of improvement plans. The plans outline many appropriate actions required to raise standards rapidly. However, arrangements for monitoring

actions and evaluating their impact are not precise enough. Steps are not always measurable with clear milestones along the way. The plan would be more robust if the staff responsible for leading activities were not the same people monitoring their implementation and evaluating the impact.

Through their regular visits to the academy, governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the academy well. The Chair of the Governing Body is working closely with the trust, which has provided effective training for governors. They are beginning to ask academy leaders more challenging questions. The addition of clearer and more measurable targets to the improvement plan would make it easier for governors to judge how successfully leaders are improving teaching and raising standards. In addition, the different roles of the local governing body and officers from the trust, in holding the academy leaders to account, need to be clarified.

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

External support

Following the section 5 inspection in October 2014 and prior to the section 8 monitoring inspection in January 2015, the trust did not provide the academy with enough targeted support. This was followed by high staff turnover and a decline in standards during 2014–15. Since the monitoring inspection in January, the support and challenge provided by the academy trust has improved. By deploying and recruiting leaders with proven records of school improvement to the academy, the trust has enabled encouraging improvement to take place. The trust responds well to requests from the Principal to help address weaknesses which still remain. Support from Hampshire local authority has been put in place to support staff development. These development opportunities have been welcomed by academy staff and contribute to the changes taking place, but it is too soon to evaluate their impact on pupils' achievement.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Isle of Wight. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Theresa Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector