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John Peckham
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Dear Mr Peckham

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Cowes Enterprise College

Following my visit with Seamus Murphy, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 23 February 2016, 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 me and the time you took to discuss behaviour in your academy.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills was concerned about behaviour at the academy.

Evidence

Inspectors considered evidence that included:

- observations of pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons
- observations of pupils' behaviour throughout the day, including discussions with pupils
- documentary evidence
- discussions with school leaders and staff.

Having evaluated the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers have taken effective action to improve behaviour and secure consistently positive attitudes to learning.

Context

Cowes Enterprise College is an 11 to 18 academy of average size with 1,012 pupils on roll. There are 123 learners in the sixth form. The academy is part of the Ormiston Academies Trust (OAT), having converted in September 2014. The current academy has not previously been inspected although the predecessor school, also called Cowes Enterprise College, was judged to require special measures in November 2012.

Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are eligible for additional government funding through the pupil premium is slightly below the national average. The number of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above the national average, as is the number of pupils with statements of special educational needs or education, health and care plans. Since the inspection of the predecessor school, there have been several changes in the senior leadership team, including the Principal. The current Principal took up his post in January 2015. The academy moved to a new building in 2014. The academy faces difficulties in recruiting teaching staff, particularly in mathematics, languages and science.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour requires further improvement in some lessons and for some pupils. However, there has been much progress since the predecessor school was inspected in November 2012. Raised expectations of conduct and attitudes to learning, together with effective packages of support for those pupils whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable, have reduced rates of exclusion and instances of low-level disruption. The academy's behaviour management systems and leaders' optimistic but firm approach to raising standards are restoring the school's local reputation and parental confidence.

A new behaviour management policy has already contributed to improvements in behaviour. Pupils demonstrate that they understand how the systems of warnings, consequences and rewards work. In addition, the recent zero tolerance policy regarding mobile phones has had a welcome impact on day-to-day inappropriate behaviour, squabbles between pupils and potential confrontations with staff. Staff are impressed with the way in which pupils have complied with the new rule about mobile phones. Pupils also told inspectors that although they found the new policy 'annoying' at first, they now welcome it and feel that it is improving relationships and conduct around the academy.

Most lessons proceed smoothly and there is little low-level disruption. Positive attitudes to learning were observed in many lessons. For example, pupils are attentive and diligent when teachers insist upon a punctual and prompt start to lessons and make sure that all pupils concentrate and listen carefully to instructions and explanations. Pupils also respond positively when teachers provide sufficiently challenging work to sustain their concentration and motivation throughout the lesson.

Academy leaders confirm that one of their key priorities is making improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They have clearly identified that better teaching has a positive effect on pupils' attitudes. However, not all teachers in the academy insist on high enough standards. Pupils told inspectors that although there had been a lot of improvements in behaviour there were still lessons that were disrupted by poor behaviour, notably when expectations were too low or when they felt that lessons were dull or not explained clearly. In a few lessons, inspectors observed pupils losing concentration and drifting off, chatting aimlessly before the end of lessons because they had finished work and had nothing else to do. On other occasions, pupils took too long to get started on their work and whispered among themselves when they should have been listening to their teachers' instructions. A few books seen were messily presented with some inappropriate doodling, which had not been challenged by the teacher. These pupils were not setting out to be disrespectful or deliberately careless, but had been allowed to develop poor habits and a too-casual attitude.

Pupils are polite and friendly to visitors and staff. Relationships between pupils and staff are respectful and warm and pupils get along well together. Pupils spoke to inspectors openly and willingly about the recent changes in the academy and clearly identified what had improved. They are generally happy and positive about their futures and there is a sense of confidence about what they are working towards. Academy records show that there are few instances of bullying or derogatory language and, when they do occur, they are dealt with effectively. Pupils also confirmed that bullying was rare and that they were confident in academy leaders' responses to any concerns they had. Pupils who have benefited from intensive support to improve their behaviour speak honestly about how the academy helped them and turned their behaviour around.

Breaktimes and lunchtimes are generally orderly and calm and pupils move around the school between lessons quietly and with consideration. Pupils are well supervised around the site. A policy of meeting and greeting at the start of the day promotes safety and care, and helps to tackle any initial concerns with uniform or punctuality promptly, without interruption to learning. Pupils generally wear their uniform smartly and few need reminding.

Some overly boisterous, physical behaviour from a small number of boys was observed by inspectors and a few pupils do not move urgently enough from one

lesson to another, taking their time, finishing their snacks and tending to dawdle. Staff working in the academy canteen reported that most pupils are courteous, although some younger pupils are not as polite as the older ones. Canteen staff also reported that pupils left too much litter during breaktimes and lunchtimes. However, pupils generally treat the building with respect and keep it clean and tidy.

The number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced over the last year. Academy leaders are rightly pleased that pupils have responded well to raised expectations and a tougher approach to disruptive behaviour. Individually tailored packages of support help pupils whose behaviour is particularly challenging. Since September 2015, a new facility has opened for the small number of pupils who are at risk of exclusion or in need of more intensive support for their emotional and social needs. It is early days, but Capstan House's combination of a safe and calm environment, individual care and therapeutic programmes has already had a very positive impact on reducing exclusions and use of the isolation room for particular pupils. Parents of pupils who have benefited from the support from Capstan House report that they feel reassured and that their children are happier and more positive about learning and themselves.

Pupils with special educational needs or disability are well supported with a passport or behaviour plan which provides guidance for class teachers to use in order to encourage good behaviour in class. Academy leaders meet on a daily basis to review support for pupils who may be causing concern because of their individual needs, welfare or behaviour. In this way, academy leaders ensure that pupils are supported in a prompt and timely way if needed.

Pupils' rates of attendance continue to improve. Compared with this time last year, most groups of pupils have improved their attendance and overall figures are close to national figures, which is very encouraging. However, while improvements have been made, some pupils who are disadvantaged, or who have special educational needs or disability, do not attend as well as they should. Academy leaders are rightly concerned about the higher than national average proportions of pupils who are persistently absent. The attendance manager takes both a strategic and hands-on approach to ensuring that pupils improve their attendance. She knows the pupils at risk of poor attendance and works tenaciously with families to reduce unnecessary absence.

Procedures for safeguarding and protecting pupils from risk meet requirements. Records of checks on staff working in the academy are fully in place. Staff are highly vigilant and report concerns about pupils' welfare and safety promptly and in accordance with academy procedures. Referrals to the local authority children's services are made in a timely way and are recorded in detail with a helpful chronology.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that consistently high expectations of pupils' conduct in lessons and attitudes to learning are maintained throughout the academy in every lesson.
- Reduce rates of persistent absence, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs or disability.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce

Her Majesty's Inspector