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The Co-Principals
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Dear Mrs Rhodes and Mr Corbett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Stantonbury Campus

Following my visit to your school on 13 October 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 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 April 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in April 2015 the school was also judged to require improvement.

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

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with both of you, representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. We briefly visited some lessons to see teaching and learning, and I observed students' behaviour around the campus at morning break.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the Principal has left and you are both sharing the leadership of the school for at least the remainder of this academic year.

Main findings

Some outcomes for students in the 2015 GCSE examinations were better than in 2014. Students did better in English because more made at least the progress expected of them. As a consequence, the average grade achieved in English was slightly better than the 2014 national average. Science remains a subject in which students achieve well. Mathematics results improved slightly but students still underachieved in this subject. Examination outcomes in other subjects included some strengths, especially in business studies, dance, drama and media studies, but there was too much variability overall. Gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged students and others were smaller in 2015 than previously, but more remains to be done to eliminate these differences. The review of the use of the pupil premium funding required as an outcome of the previous inspection is now underway. Outcomes in the sixth form were similar to last year, maintaining the success demonstrated in vocational qualifications evident over the last few years.

You and other senior staff show determination to maintain a tight grip on the progress of all groups of students through the twice-termly measurements of their achievement in every subject. Useful steps have been taken to make teachers' assessments more reliable and, as a consequence, you now feel more confident about the quality of this information. It is good that you pay particular attention to those groups which have underachieved in the past, including students from disadvantaged backgrounds, students of White British heritage and boys. The analyses undertaken each time are thorough and your actions are closely linked to other priority areas in the improvement plan, such as providing training for teachers and improving the culture of learning across the campus. While there is a useful concentration on ensuring that as many students as possible make the progress expected of them, there is less emphasis than is desirable on bringing about very good progress.

You are quite rightly prioritising improvements in the quality of teaching. Subject leaders are now required to monitor teaching and learning more closely, and you hold them to account for the successful implementation of intervention strategies over an appropriately short timescale. There is a good blend of short, informal ways of sharing good practice, and more structured training to meet identified needs. Changes to the curriculum and assessment methods are being developed alongside these improvements to teaching. For example, there is now a greater awareness of the importance of identifying specific concepts and skills for students to master at key points, and teachers are becoming more skilled at doing so. This involves teachers gauging achievement more frequently and accurately in lessons, together

with more emphasis on students responding to marking and feedback, and assessing their own work.

Some behaviour around the site continues to be lively and boisterous outside of lessons. While there was no unpleasant or anti-social behaviour seen, there is a sense of poor behaviour being responded to and dealt with effectively rather than students showing an innate desire to meet high standards. You are pleased with how well the steps taken to supervise social times, with members of staff being a much more visible presence, have improved behaviour. More rapid and effective senior staff call-outs to lessons and faculty buddying arrangements have helped to improve classroom behaviour. These measures have not yet, however, struck at the root of the issue by examining the underlying changes in culture required to make students' behaviour reliably good or outstanding across the site and throughout the day. Attendance remains low and too many students are persistently absent. While there are some improvements since the start of term, they are slight compared to the same period last year. There are potentially effective systems in place to address poor attendance but their real impact is yet to be seen. Punctuality to lessons is improving but too many students were still seen during the inspection visit moving slowly to lessons after they had officially begun. Some of your senior leaders have had an opportunity to visit other schools to see how behaviour and the culture of a school can be improved dramatically and securely, and they found this useful.

You, other senior leaders and governors demonstrate real determination to bring about improvements, and you have set out ideas about how this will be achieved in a clear and well-presented improvement plan. There are useful descriptions of what will be achieved on a term-by-term basis. Governors feel that this is a useful way of helping them to gauge how quickly improvements are coming about, and to offer challenge to you and other senior leaders. Subject leaders continue to be held to account in regular meetings, and outcomes for key groups of students are used to set a clear and focused agenda. There is recognition on the part of governors and your senior staff of the need to have some clearer definitions of exactly what constitutes good and outstanding practice in all of the school's work.

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

The local authority has been working much more closely and effectively with the school recently. Its understanding of the school's needs is good enough to allow it to broker good and useful support from each of the three teaching schools locally.

These are:

- Denbigh High School, which is giving support with developing the quality of teaching and establishing good links between subject areas in the school and other schools
- Shenley Brook End School, which is supporting the development of mathematics and offering general leadership and management support
- Oakgrove School, which is undertaking the review of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged students who benefit from the pupil premium and will continue to work with the school on its response to this audit.

You also work closely with St Paul's Catholic School on developing better practice in English. In addition, advisory staff from the local authority have offered useful support in mathematics and humanities, and for the development of teaching and learning, and students' behaviour.

The progress of the school towards its targets is monitored closely by the local authority-led targeted intervention board, which meets monthly. This serves to recognise gains in provision and outcomes, and also to identify the need for further intervention at key points.

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

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector