

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



25 May 2017

Mr Stuart Smith
Principal
The Hastings Academy
Rye Road
Hastings
East Sussex
TN35 5DN

Dear Mr Smith

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Hastings Academy

Following my visit to your school on 12 May 2017, 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 January 2016. 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 school.

The school's leaders should take further action to:

- ensure that staff focus relentlessly on improving the quality of teaching so that all pupils are enabled to achieve as well as they can
- reduce the stubborn, persistent absence of a few pupils
- limit, even more, the number of incidents of challenging behaviour.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the principal, other senior leaders, a group of teachers at different stages of their careers, pupils, members of the governing body and representatives of the sponsor to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I reviewed the school's own evaluation of its current performance and the most recent action plan. I examined other documents and took into account the views of the large number of parents who had responded to Parent View, Ofsted's confidential online survey. You led me on a tour of the school and we twice made visits to a range of lessons while learning was in progress.

Context

Since the last inspection, the previous principal has resigned. You took up your post on an interim basis and became the principal in November 2016. This followed a short period when you were leading improvements to the school as a newly appointed vice-principal. A second vice-principal joined the school at Easter 2016 to strengthen leadership. Many teachers have left the school. Leaders have successfully recruited suitable replacements. You have stabilised the staffing in recent months so that there will be very few staff members leaving at the end of the academic year.

Main findings

You have set yourself and the school clear targets for improvement. Until your appointment, necessary changes had not been put in place quickly enough. Current priorities, such as improving teaching and learning, are captured in helpful documents. You know the school extremely well and are disarmingly frank about its strengths and shortcomings. You hid nothing from me and also demonstrated an admirable desire to get things right. You are ably supported by other leaders. Those responsible for administrative aspects of the school carry out their duties effectively and know how to ensure nothing is left to chance.

Leaders responsible for the good order in the school and managing pupils' behaviour are passionate about what they do. In a relatively short period of time, they have improved existing systems and added some new ones, so that any incident is logged, evaluated, and appropriate action put in place. Leaders have ensured that parents fully understand the reasons for any sanctions. Pupils are in no doubt as to why they have been given a 'consequence'.

Similarly, you have raised expectations about attendance and punctuality. Staff are now rigorously following up these expectations, as they already do to ensure that pupils are wearing the correct uniform. As we toured the school, it was clear that everyone acts together to manage behaviour properly and set an appropriate climate for learning. It was also clear that the vast majority of pupils abide by the simple rules. Those that do not are dealt with appropriately and fairly. As a result, you have created a culture where uninterrupted teaching is possible and where most pupils get

on with their learning positively. There remain a few troubled pupils whose behaviour is challenging. The occasions when they become a danger to themselves or others are reducing rapidly. Staff work skilfully in teams to limit the impact of pupils' behaviour on the learning environment.

Teachers told me that they like the fact that they are more able to get on with teaching effectively now. Their morale has lifted. They particularly like the efforts made to maintain their well-being. The Friday 'cake club' is a small illustration of how leaders have acted to ensure that working at The Hastings Academy is enjoyable. In addition to building staff confidence and trust, leaders have also committed to improving their skills. Staff now benefit from secure, purposeful and tailored training. Staff have a range of professional learning opportunities related to the relevant stage in their career, or their personal aspirations.

Consequently, the quality of teaching and learning is rising. You showed me compelling evidence of improvements to teaching over time. Teachers, for the most part, observe your minimum expectations and stick to what is essential for each lesson. Teachers plan their lessons well, taking into account the different starting points of each set of pupils. Teachers use technology confidently to speed up some processes. They use a software application well to communicate among themselves, with pupils and with parents. Leaders use information retrieved from the system to assist monitoring and checking processes.

Consequently, pupils' attainment is also rising. We agreed that pupils' low prior attainment means that many will have to make rapid progress over time to meet important national benchmarks. Your impressive speech to Year 11 pupils at the start of their examination period, during an assembly, demonstrated clearly how you are determined that they all do as well as they can. Leaders provided clear forecasts of these pupils' likely performance in their upcoming examinations. You predict confidently that results will be better than in previous years. You showed me compelling evidence of why you are sure this will be the case.

Leaders benefit from knowing exactly what their roles entail. The senior leader responsible for pupils' well-being, attendance and behaviour has a realistic and detailed understanding of the scale of the challenges. She knows that rates of attendance need to rise further. She also knows that a few pupils are still absent too frequently. With you, she has put in place a range of measures to address this and is checking regularly the impact of these improvements. Similarly, with others, she is systematically tracking the details of any incidents of poor behaviour. This is essential because the number of times you need to exclude pupils remains high. Also, the agencies you are working with to improve behaviour need detailed information to ensure that these pupils get appropriate support.

External support

The Hastings Academies Trust provides strategic leadership to you, as well as focused school support. The former executive principal of the school, together with the current trust director of school improvement, challenge you and other leaders and hold the local governing body to account. The local governing body knows the school well and ensures that resources are used efficiently. All contribute to supporting your relentless drive for improvement. The growth of the trust, and its planned incorporation of other schools, is deliberately intended to give even greater leadership capacity as the school progresses towards being judged good at the next full inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector