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Rob Corbett
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Dear Mr Corbett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ifield Community College

Following my visit to your school on 27 June 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 March 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in March 2016, 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 the principal, the vice-principal and briefly with other senior leaders. I met with a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with your school improvement partner and members of the governing body. Leaders' evaluation of the school's performance was reviewed alongside the school improvement and action plan. I met with a group of pupils and examined a small sample of pupils' work. You led me on two lengthy tours of the school, where we observed learning

taking place during the school's focused day on personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. I examined a wide range of the school's documents. These included information about the sixth form, improvements to teaching, learning and assessment, and the school's work with pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Context

There have been no major changes to the staffing of the school since the last inspection. At the end of each term when some teachers leave, leaders successfully recruit suitable replacements so that the quality of education is at least maintained.

Main findings

Leaders, and the team around the school, used the last section 5 inspection to redouble their efforts to make necessary improvements. You and other leaders have taken a systematic and thorough approach to addressing shortcomings in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This professional development activity was under way at the time of the inspection. It is now coming to fruition with evidence seen in much better outcomes for pupils. For example, in 2016, Year 11 pupils' results were, overall, 15% better than the previous year. This meant that their progress from key stage 2 to the end of key stage 4 was broadly in line with national expectations. Results are set to be even better for the present cohort. This is despite your adjustment of the curriculum towards a more academic suite of GCSE subjects.

Rightly, though, you have maintained a good but narrower range of vocational subjects which are more suitable to some pupils who begin them in Year 9. Similarly, leaders have begun a process of redesigning the curriculum for the 16 to 19 study programmes, so that it is more attractive for pupils wanting a school-based sixth form experience. As a result, the school is oversubscribed for the Year 7 that will begin in September 2017. Equally, recruitment to the 16 to 19 study programmes is strong, so that the sixth form will expand markedly in September 2017.

Your efforts to involve parents more closely in their child's education are proving successful. This is contributing to making Ifield a first-choice school for many families. Pupils like the interactive system that tells them how well they are doing, what their attendance is like and how well they are behaving. The few parents I met said that they very much like the instant feedback they now receive about these aspects of their children's education.

Most notably, and as required by the last inspection team, you have set about improving the school by focusing intently on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. You have implemented a system where each teacher has to record accurately the outcomes of assessment activity and report them to the leadership

team regularly and in detail. The vice-principal has developed a rigorous system for checking improvements to teaching, and makes sure that staff receive appropriate and well-focused training to support their professional development needs.

You appointed an experienced assistant principal to take the lead on reducing persistent absence and improving attendance overall. All information is carefully analysed and explored in case any patterns of absence or trends in attendance can be identified. We agreed that some more work could be done on examining the impact of long-term sickness on pupils' attendance levels. There is clear evidence that you are using a range of strategies, including the employment of an attendance officer, to try to reduce further the number of occasions when pupils miss learning. Consequently, the school's headline attendance figure is getting closer all the time to the national average.

Other aspects of safeguarding are managed highly effectively. Excellent systems are in place to ensure that only fit and proper persons come to work or volunteer at the school. Safer recruitment practice is exemplary. Also, leaders insist that staff are given good-quality annual training on current safeguarding issues, such as the school's 'Prevent' duty, ways to spot potential radicalisation, and how to support pupils maintain their personal safety in online contexts. You showed me impressive records of how staff training is up to date in these areas. Governors maintain good oversight of this activity.

Governance has been revitalised and governors are exercising their duties well. Governors now have access to good-quality information so that they can challenge the school's work. They are proud of the school. They know what is working well. They are also aware of what else needs to improve. Minutes of their meetings show that they hold you to account for all aspects of the school's work, but especially your skilful management of the school's tight finances and improvements to pupils' performance.

Your action plans are aligned accurately to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Each senior leader has responsibility for an aspect of the plan and this is helping to enforce the necessary changes. You coordinate their activities efficiently and, as a result, have created a purposeful and productive team. Sensibly, you have spotted other members of staff with particular aptitudes and skills. Each has been given a sharply focused task and, as a result, leadership capacity in the school is growing quickly.

External support

The school has been ably supported by Tanbridge House school in Horsham in its journey towards becoming a good school. This is increasingly a mutually beneficial relationship. This is because you have formed an appropriately professional set of working arrangements with the headteacher. Staff from Tanbridge House contribute to school reviews, training, coaching and other professional development activities.

You are intending to work together next year on adjustments to the assessment system once you have analysed the outcomes of the 2017 set of examinations. This is also a sensible and thoughtful approach. It is based on what has already proved helpful, such as the consolidation of thinking, benchmarking against practice elsewhere and ensuring that staff have access to strong role-models.

The local authority is keeping a watchful eye on the school's progress and supports this 'school-to-school' approach. The local authority supported Tanbridge House's proposal to work with Ifield as part of its headteacher's activity as a national leader of education.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes

Her Majesty's Inspector