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11 June 2015

Mr Colin Taylor
The Headteacher
Oakmeeds Community College
Station Road
Burgess Hill
West Sussex
RH15 9EA

Dear Mr Taylor

Special measures monitoring inspection of Oakmeeds Community College

Following my visit with Nouredin Khassal and David Webster, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 9 and 10 June 2015, 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 during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for West Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2014

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching, especially in mathematics, by ensuring that teachers:
 - have much higher expectations of what students can achieve, especially the most able, those in receipt of the pupil premium funding, disabled pupils and pupils who have special educational needs
 - plan lessons that are more challenging, so that all students make at least good progress from their starting points
 - check students' progress more often during lessons to ensure that activities meet the needs of all and adapt work when necessary to do so
 - use information about students' abilities accurately so that work is set at the correct level, especially for those who learn most quickly
 - mark all work regularly and accurately, giving students clear feedback that helps them to improve their work, especially in mathematics and science, and require students to respond to the advice given.
- Raise standards and improve the progress of all groups of students in a range of subjects, particularly English, mathematics and science, by:
 - developing teachers' knowledge and understanding of the information they have about students' progress and how best to use it in planning and teaching.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership, management and governance by ensuring that:
 - the school's arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements
 - leaders have an accurate view of the school's performance
 - leaders, including subject leaders, check rigorously on the quality of teaching and use information about students' progress more effectively so that judgements made about teaching accurately reflect students' achievement
 - governors challenge senior leaders and hold them more effectively to account for the quality of teaching and the achievement of all groups of students
 - pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding is used more effectively to accelerate the progress of eligible students so that the attainment gaps with their peers in school and nationally are closed rapidly
 - teachers are held to account for planning lessons which meet students' different needs.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 9 and 10 June 2015

Evidence

Inspectors met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, members of staff, groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors, and a representative from the local authority. They spoke with the headteacher of the nearby teaching school, Millais School, whose staff work alongside and support those at Oakmeeds. Inspectors observed 22 lessons, of which five were seen jointly with senior staff. Inspectors also made short visits to a number of other lessons, attended an assembly and heard Year 7 students read. They scrutinised students' work. Inspectors evaluated documents such as the school's improvement plan, self-evaluations and minutes of meetings. They considered correspondence from parents.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Students' progress continues to show improvement in all year groups and for different groups of students. Consequently, the school confidently anticipates further improvement in GCSE performance in 2015. Students are making better progress and attaining more highly in mathematics. However, the school recognises there is further to go. Students' achievement in English has been consistent in recent years; the school predicts improvement in GCSE results in the subject in 2015.

The school now analyses, in much more detail than before, the achievement of disadvantaged students who are entitled to be supported by the additional government funding known as the pupil premium. Recently, these students have made as much progress as other pupils in the school, which is an improvement. Similarly, disabled students and those with special educational needs are also making better progress, in line with their classmates. There continues to be no significant difference in achievement between girls and boys.

Students all have clear personal goals or targets and this is better embedded than at the last monitoring visit. These are helping to raise aspiration and achievement. In some subjects, including art, photography, physical education and music, regular and precise feedback from teachers to students, and students to other students, is helping to speed up the progress students make. However, across subjects, higher attaining students do not always achieve as well as they might when the work set is insufficiently challenging for them.

The school focuses much effort on reading, with regular 'drop everything and read' sessions for everyone. Students use the well-stocked library with enthusiasm. Year 7 students read confidently. They were able to use their knowledge of phonics (linking letters and sounds) accurately when reading unfamiliar words. Students who find reading difficult pointed out clearly how the school helps them to improve. Their reading ages had risen notably. The most competent readers receive less help from

the school, in choosing their books for example, so the level of challenge in the reading material they choose is not consistently high enough.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching continues to improve, leading to students' better achievement. Teachers have worked hard to develop their use of the teaching strategies that the school expects, such as sharing learning objectives, using effective questions, providing work suited to the needs of all students' different needs, approaches to marking students' work and assessing students' learning using criteria. Support and advice from the local teaching school continue to be very helpful. However, these strategies are not applied consistently effectively across the school. The variations in quality identified at the last monitoring inspection still exist. Students continue, as a result, to learn better in some subjects and lessons than in others.

In a Year 10 art lesson, for example, students made rapid progress. This was because the teacher provided detailed and personalised feedback to students who clearly understood the GCSE grade criteria they were working towards. They made immediate improvements in their practical work and really enjoyed the lesson. In a Year 10 geography lesson, the teacher also used GCSE grade criteria while students, very usefully, revisited previous learning about longshore drift. The use of the criteria was, however, less effective than in the art lesson, as the direct link between the criteria and helping the students to improve their work was less precisely explained and understood by students. In some cases, students lost interest and started chatting about next week's sports events.

Teaching in mathematics shows improvement, with higher expectations of students evident. For example, in one lesson observed, the teacher's clear explanations and effective questioning helped students to improve and reshape their thinking about factors in algebra.

Teachers are improving the way that they set work to meet the differing needs of students. They are increasingly aware of the specific circumstances and needs of the students in each class. Previous work on improving teaching and learning for higher attaining students has not continued as effectively. The needs of such students are not always fully enough met.

In common with inspectors, the headteacher of Millais teaching school identifies that staff need to embed still further the changes that have been made in order to improve the consistency of teaching across the school.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students behave in a friendly, considerate and orderly way. They are helpful and polite, showing pride in their school and wearing their uniforms and physical education kits smartly. They work and socialise together encouragingly.

Generally, students are attentive in lessons and keen to learn. However, when the teaching is less engaging, students' attention wanes. In discussions, students pointed out that this happens often, especially in younger year groups. Students are generally punctual to lessons and this is actively encouraged by staff.

Students' attendance has improved notably across all groups of students. Far fewer students than previously are persistently absent. This reflects the school's improving systems to promote good attendance and the fact that students enjoy school. The headteacher has made a number of exclusions this year. There is clear evidence that the excluded students have been supported to return positively to school life.

Students' behaviour is safe. This was notable, for example, in physical education lessons involving javelin throwing. Students understood very clearly the safety rules and reasons behind them. They were alert to any danger. This meant that many students could safely throw javelins at the same time. The students also gave each other useful and constructive feedback on their techniques. Good behaviour led to good learning.

The school has continued to update and refresh its safeguarding procedures. These have been helpfully externally reviewed and fully comply with requirements.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher is persistent in his determination to lead the school to a better place. He shows great resilience in building reliable systems and a stronger leadership team. He has positive and very constructive relationships with students, knowing many of them well. He and the deputy headteacher have an effective and complementary partnership. The deputy headteacher proactively and effectively leads in many areas, including developing the school's '2020 vision' for its future working with the headteacher and middle leaders.

Other senior leaders, including the assistant headteachers, understand their roles well. They are realistic and positive about what needs to be done. They all make valuable contributions to the school's greater capacity to improve itself.

Middle leaders, including subject leaders, are developing their roles, but still with mixed success. There is evidence of particularly strong leadership in humanities subjects. The leadership of the mathematics department shows further improvement from the strong position at the last monitoring visit, leading to higher expectations of students. In science, a planned handover from the outgoing subject leader to the new one is proceeding suitably.

School leaders have continued to improve teaching systematically, working with staff to develop some key teaching strategies across the school. Their judgements about the quality of teaching are accurate and well considered. The school evaluates itself

honestly. Staff use a very wide range of methods to find out how well the school is doing and they collate this information efficiently and clearly.

The school has continued to develop effective management systems, such as those for promoting good attendance, utilising pupil premium funding, tracking students' academic progress, and managing the performance and pay progression of staff. The school improvement plan effectively promotes the improvements that have been made in the areas identified by Ofsted in January 2014. The system of regular review cycles gives considerable momentum and avoids any slippage. The school's draft improvement plan for 2015/16 has useful elements but does not link explicitly enough to the ambitions of the school's vision for its future.

The school offers a broad curriculum, especially at Key Stage 4. There are many useful visits out and fieldwork opportunities. Students benefit from a very wide range of GCSE options. Consequently, almost all students move on at age 16 to employment or further education, with relevant qualifications. However, some students have not been allocated the subjects they chose as the school recently decided not to run GCSE courses in citizenship and music in 2015/16. This has caused some concern to parents who perceive the school has not honoured its stated commitments. Governors said they will review this decision.

Students who met with inspectors perceive something similar. Very constructively, they gave several examples of where they believe the school has not delivered sufficiently on its promises to them. For example, many stated that the school's reward systems do not feel fair, well publicised, or equally available to all students. Higher attaining students who met with inspectors almost universally agree that the school does not consistently provide them with challenging enough work. This concerns them as they are rightly aiming for the highest grades. Despite the school telling students that they have autonomy, students feel that they cannot easily discuss with teachers how they learn and revise best. Revision tasks, in their view, are not well suited to their needs. This frustrates them as they feel that some of their time is not used well. However, students justifiably say that teachers in a few subjects, in particular history, are very good at helping them to learn best. One student summed all of the concerns up, saying that the school's own motto 'succeeding together' does not fully ring true.

The governing body continues to improve and sharpen its work. Members ask increasingly probing questions of school staff. Governors spend time in school, seeing its work at first hand, as well as receiving reports from staff. They reflect carefully on options for the school, including the possibility of becoming an academy in the future.

External support

The local authority reviews the progress of the school systematically. Its officers provide useful support and advice to governors and staff. The local authority brokered, and funds, the very useful support from the teaching school. All of these

aspects of its support are proving valuable in helping the school build its own capacity to improve.

Priorities for further improvement

- Sustain the support for teachers, internally provided and from the teaching school, so that they can use the teaching strategies that have been introduced judiciously and consistently effectively.
- Provide more challenge for, and listen more closely to the concerns and suggestions of, students, especially those who are higher attaining.
- Link the school's improvement plan with its emerging vision.