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7 November 2014

Mr Colin Taylor
Headteacher
Oakmeeds Community College
Station Road
Burgess Hill
West Sussex
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Dear Mr Taylor

Special measures monitoring inspection of Oakmeeds Community College

Following my visit with Clare Gillies and Sandra Teacher, Additional Inspectors, to your college on 5-6 November 2014, 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 college's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the college 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 college is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The college may not 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

Christopher Anders
Associate Inspector

Appointed as an Additional Inspector, under the powers relating to additional inspectors, in paragraph 11 of Part 2 of Schedule 12 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

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 second monitoring inspection on 5 and 6 November 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the college's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers and groups of students. Inspectors also spoke with the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority and the headteacher of a local teaching school. Inspectors observed 23 lessons, six of which were conducted jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors checked the college's procedures to keep students safe and secure. Inspectors looked at a range of students' work and spoke with students informally at break and lunchtime.

Context

There have been further changes in teaching staff since the last inspection, with 16 staff leaving. Four teachers joined the college in September 2014, including one senior leader. Five posts are currently being filled by temporary teachers. Six members of support staff started work at the college this term.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The college's provisional 2014 examination results show the proportion of students achieving five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics was higher than in 2013. Results in 16 subject areas rose, including in English, mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics. Outcomes declined in six subjects, including in general and additional science. The results for GCSE examinations overall were a little lower than expected. Leaders are undertaking further analysis of the achievement of groups of students to identify strengths and further areas for improvement.

Current students are making better progress overall than at the time of the section 5 inspection. However, significant gaps in achievement between some groups of students in some subjects remain. Students in Years 10 and 11 who have special educational needs do not make as much progress as other students, particularly in mathematics. Not all teachers identify those students at risk of underachievement quickly enough, or ensure that they have the support they need to catch up. The college has taken some effective action to improve the attitude to learning of those students eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after by the local authority). For example, a pilot programme working with families led to an improvement in some students' attendance.

College leaders have wisely introduced more frequent assessment points, which is enabling them to identify those students who need further support to make progress. Trial examinations for Year 11 later in the autumn term will provide a further check on students' attainment.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is improving. In the most effective lessons, teachers plan well and adapt what they are doing in response to the understanding demonstrated by the students. Many teachers are now using differentiated resources in lessons to ensure all students can make progress and that more able students are challenged. When the teacher directs students to the appropriate activity, the young people achieve most. Time limits, when used for activities in lessons, further promote achievement through an increased sense of urgency in the lesson.

Many teachers are knowledgeable about the needs of the students in their class. Information sheets indicating previous progress support this understanding, and the planned introduction of more detailed class plans for each teacher will ensure learning can be even more tailored. However, not all teachers understand or use current information about students' achievement effectively to spot those who are falling behind or to ensure that they are provided with appropriate additional help.

In less effective lessons, teachers' planning does not support learning because the time has not been given to careful thought and preparation in advance. Subject leaders in some areas are less active in identifying teachers who need support with preparing appropriate activities in order to increase the students' rate of progress.

When marking books, there is growing consistency in the use of 'what went well' and 'even better if'. The approach is understood and used by the students as well as the teachers. Students set themselves short-term targets in this way and receive helpful written comments from teachers explaining how to improve. However, where marking is weaker, comments are not always helpful to students because they are bland or repetitive and students are not always given time to respond to the teachers' feedback. Where time is provided, presentation of work is also at its best. This means that students can refer to previous learning in future lessons and also use class work for later revision.

Senior leaders have changed their approach to target setting. Students work towards 'goals', based on the grades they will attain if they make expected progress. They are then encouraged to aim higher. At the time of the monitoring inspection, leaders had not analysed the impact of the new strategy.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour and conduct in lessons are a strength of the college. They arrive on time to lessons. Calm and orderly classrooms mean that good teaching leads to good learning. Although a few students continue to challenge the college's expectations, clear sanctions are in place to punish any poor behaviour. Furthermore, revised roles for senior leaders mean that the poor behaviour is tackled

consistently. High standards of appearance are enforced and the students take pride in their new uniform, which has now been adopted by all year groups.

The college's arrangements for safeguarding now meet statutory requirements and staff are fully aware of procedures and requirements. Students say they are well cared for and safe. Attendance overall is above the national average. However, attendance for students with special educational needs and disabilities is significantly lower than national average.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Leaders at all levels are rightly focused on increased consistency of teaching practice across the college. The weakest teaching has been tackled. However, improving the quality of teaching where it causes any concern remains a priority.

Leaders observe teachers more frequently to check their teaching and assess students' learning. They now have a clearer picture of the quality of teaching and its impact on students' achievement. As a result, senior leaders too have an accurate understanding of strengths and weaknesses. They are increasingly skilled at observing teaching and analysing what teachers need to do to improve. Leaders rightly provide teachers with useful feedback and challenge.

Higher expectations by senior leaders mean subject leaders are clear about what they should do and how they will be assessed. The deputy headteacher leads the subject leaders and his drive to improve learning and standards is respected. Senior leaders are also more confident in their challenge of subject leaders and provide focused support where necessary. The support provided includes the use of staff seconded from a local teaching school.

Increasing the rate of progress of disadvantaged pupils rightly remains a priority. A review into the college's use of pupil premium funding was completed this term and correctly identified that the college needs to look at early intervention and track the impact of support programmes in Key Stage 3. The review also confirms that 'well-structured plans are in place with clear priorities' and states 'long-term planning is evident'. One recommendation from the report is that progress of students eligible for the pupil premium should be evaluated at all line management meetings.

Governors are ambitious for the college and keen to see rapid progress. Following an external review of governance, an additional governor, who has secondary school headship experience, has been appointed by the local authority. Governors now use links with departments to report on regular visits to the governing body. As a result of their visits and the training they have received, governors are able to ask senior leaders challenging questions about the quality of teaching and students' progress.

Senior leaders' and governors' actions are guided by the improvement plan and the local authority statement of action. These two documents drive 30-day periods in

which college leaders evaluate how well the college is doing and the impact of further actions for improvement. The college's actions to improve teaching and achievement are adjusted if they are not working well enough. A regular review of progress against the improvement plan means that the local authority and teaching school are able to assess progress and provide the necessary support.

College leaders and governors are considering plans to become a sponsored academy.

External support

The college is well supported by the local authority and the Millais Teaching School. Three senior staff, including the teaching school's headteacher, are seconded for one day each week to work with college staff. Staff from the college also visit the teaching school for training and development. College staff identify this support, training and development as an important part of the college's recent improvement. The local authority has a quality assuring role, checking the work of both the college and the teaching school.