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Stephen Chamberlain
Headteacher
The Hollyfield School and Sixth Form Centre
Surbiton Hill Road
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Dear Mr Chamberlain

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Hollyfield School and Sixth Form Centre

Following my visit to your school on 7 May 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 February 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- sharpen the action plan by including greater precision about its success measures and intended targets
- implement without delay outcomes from the planned external review of governance, ensuring there is sufficient clarity about how the governing body will challenge and support the headteacher in ensuring high quality teaching and leadership.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you and other leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, the school improvement partner, and the headteacher, deputy

headteacher and the Chair of the Governing Body of Grey Court School, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. In addition, I had a telephone conversation with a local authority representative prior to the inspection. I evaluated the school action plan and reviewed other documentation. I briefly visited some lessons focussing on the impact of school's actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and I spoke informally with some students.

Context

The headteacher will be retiring at the end of the summer term. The headteacher of Grey Court School has been appointed as the new headteacher. She will take up this post in September 2014 and will be the headteacher of both schools. The governing bodies and senior leadership of both schools are working in partnership with the aim, that if all progresses smoothly, a multi-academy trust will be in place by April 2015. A new head of the English department has been appointed and she will take up her post in September 2014. In the interim, an advanced skills teacher (AST) is managing this department since April 2014.

Main findings

The school has acted decisively and quickly to make some fundamental changes. The partnership work with Grey Court, which was brokered by the local authority, is already working very well. You have a clear understanding of what needs to be tackled. You recognise that the school had taken its 'eye off the ball', and you show a strong determination to set it on a secure future path to being good. The headteacher from Grey Court, who is working with you two days a week, has brought a fresh pair of eyes to the school and is passionate and ambitious to bring about rapid and sustained improvement. The combined efforts of both of you have put the school firmly and quickly back on track.

The school's action plan is targeting the right issues, taking into account the specific areas for development from the inspection. It includes rightly other key priorities such as improving students' achievement in English, raising the achievement of specific groups such as White British boys, and narrowing the gap between the achievement of students eligible for free school meals and their peers. The plan is comprehensive but would benefit from greater precision regarding success measures and intended targets. It clearly sets out who is being held to account for each key issue. However, it is not sufficiently explicit about the role of the governing body in monitoring or evaluating some actions. Importantly, the plan sits alongside a simple yet effective statement of 'top priorities' to be delivered on a daily basis, for instance, stretch, challenge and support for pupils of all abilities.

The culture in the school is one of honesty, growing rigour and careful realism about what needs to be tackled and in what timescale. The strong thread running through

everything is that the staff at all levels are being held to account for improvement. To quote one of the leaders, they are each expected to 'bring something to the table'. The shared view of leaders is that the staff are up to the challenge. This was plain to be seen during my visit. The bar is being raised and a sign of this is that it will now be the norm that students should be making more than the expected levels of progress from their starting points.

The strong focus on greater consistency in the quality of teachers' practice is having impact. Current data show that more students are making better progress and on track, for instance, to gain five A* to C GCSEs this summer. Teachers are expected to make better use of the information that they have about students and to use this information daily to deepen students' learning. They are being more consistent in doing that. The wide menu of formal and informal training and other support is helping teachers to 'up their game', for example in English. Students are welcoming and receptive and their own attitudes to learning are making a positive difference in lessons. The strong emphasis on 'readiness to learn' principles is bringing about greater consistency. A common feature in my brief visits to lessons was that students are engaged and focussed on their learning. They are able to talk knowingly about what they are learning and how to move it on to the next level. Teachers make time for students to reflect on their written feedback, and students use this time well to think more deeply about next steps. The combination of the staff's commitment to improvement and the students' positive attitudes to learning are the vital ingredients of this improvement.

The external review of the pupil premium is scheduled for 16 May. The fact that this has not yet happened has not stopped the school from action. There is a renewed focus by leaders and other staff on the personal story of each learner and what can be done to boost their individual success. This is evident in the scrutiny being given to the progress being made by comparatively small proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium. A range of initiatives are being implemented or planned, such as setting up staff 'champions' whose role it will be to drill down into students' performance at an individual level and identify what specific actions need to be planned for those who are not achieving as well as they could. The school is in no doubt that a key challenge is to narrow the gap between those pupils eligible for the pupil premium and their peers in the school. This gap is not closing rapidly enough.

The external review of governance is programmed for 19 and 20 May. In the interim, there is some evidence that governors are exercising a greater degree of challenge. The changed committee structure is placing greater focus on students' learning and attainment. What is less evident is the mechanism for governors to focus more sharply on teaching, leadership and management.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority was instrumental in brokering quickly the partnership between The Hollyfield and Grey Court. It has well-founded confidence in this arrangement and has rightly stood back to let it take off. The two schools have equal confidence in the local authority and know that it will provide appropriate support if called on. The time being given by the headteacher of Grey Court is having a significant impact. Other support is proving to be equally valuable, such as that provided by the deputy headteacher from Grey Court and the highly experienced Chair of its Governing Body. The new school improvement partner (SIP) is also the SIP for Grey Court and early signs are that this join-up is proving to be beneficial. An external consultant has also provided effective support to the English department.

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

Yours sincerely

John Kennedy
Her Majesty's Inspector