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Mr M Thomas
Principal
The Littlehampton Academy
Fitzalan Road
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Dear Mr Thomas

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Littlehampton Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 16 July 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and councillors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- increase the pace and rigour of improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school so that they become consistently effective and impact on the progress of pupils in order for them to achieve as well as they can by the end of key stage 4
- reduce the levels of fixed-term and permanent exclusions so that they are closer to the national average.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the principal, other senior and middle leaders, pupils, members of the local board and leaders of the trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I undertook short visits to lessons accompanied by senior and middle leaders, and looked at work in pupils' books. A range of documentation was considered, including the school's action plan, self-evaluation, minutes of academy council meetings, and reports from the school improvement adviser.

Context

Since the previous inspection, you have restructured the senior leadership team to put more emphasis on improving teaching and learning. You appointed an additional vice-principal, and you reduced the number of assistant principals by one. You have appointed two new directors of faculty as well as two additional assistant directors of faculty. A number of teachers have left the school and others have joined during this period. Since April 2018, you have reduced the level of staff turnover.

Main findings

You, together with your senior leadership team and academy councillors have a clear vision of what needs to be done to improve outcomes for pupils. You have developed a detailed improvement plan, underpinned by timescales and success criteria, to review progress. You have changed the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team. This has helped to ensure that team members' roles are closely aligned to the areas identified for improvement at the previous inspection. You are successfully stabilising your staff team and recruiting suitably qualified specialist staff.

Middle leaders are positive about the opportunities you have provided to help teachers develop their teaching, learning and assessment skills. You are targeting the use of training and development, both to individual teachers and to subject areas. This is helping to bring improvements to the quality of teaching and is beginning to impact more positively on pupils' progress. Teachers are clearer about the non-negotiable elements to teaching that you expect of them. You have changed the way you are teaching English by moving towards mixed-ability groupings in key stage 3. You said that this has helped to boost the level of debate in every class.

You have overhauled the assessment systems, introduced a number of new initiatives, and have brought more rigour to moderation exercises. This has led to more accurate assessments, and school leaders are now confident that assessment information is robust. You are starting to hold staff to account more rigorously, and consequently they have become more adept at focusing on the achievement of

groups of pupils. Leaders are using assessment information to target extra support, and this is identifying underachievement more quickly.

You have revised the curriculum to ensure that it best meets the needs of your pupils. For example, you have improved the options available for your most vulnerable pupils by ensuring that they are guided to more appropriate pathways at key stage 4. This is helping pupils to develop more ably the skills and knowledge they need to achieve their potential. You have introduced the mathematics mastery programme into key stage 3. This has improved the quality of teaching in mathematics and impacted positively on pupils' progress. Intensive training is ensuring a more consistent approach across all classes.

School leaders identified that the standard of reading across the school was a barrier to some pupils making progress. Leaders carried out an initial reading-age audit and then delivered a programme of targeted support. As a result, two thirds of the pupils who took part have rapidly improved their reading ability and can now access the curriculum more effectively.

Middle leaders are now more effective in their roles. They are becoming better skilled at holding teachers in their departments to account for the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make. They are developing an understanding that achievement will not rise until teaching is consistently effective in every lesson. Evidence gathered from lesson visits, and monitoring information from middle and senior leaders show that, although the overall quality of teaching has improved, there is still further work to do to ensure greater consistency and rigour in the quality of teaching.

There is now a more robust and consistent approach to performance management. Teachers are set more relevant and challenging targets, and those targets are more closely linked to the school improvement plan. As a consequence, the high expectations you are sharing with staff are becoming more widely established, and this is leading to a greater clarity of purpose across the school.

Academy councillors are committed and ambitious for further improvement. They are using the schools monitoring information more effectively to assess which subjects or areas of the school's work need improving. Councillors told me that reports from the principal are now much more accessible. Following a recent review of governance, the trust and the local board have evaluated the effectiveness of the scheme of delegation and it is now better understood and fit for purpose. Councillors also say that since the review, the quality of communication between the school and the trust has become more frequent and clearer.

You have done much to improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. You have devised new systems and processes to ensure that pupils' behaviour is of a high standard. Pupils told me that since the new initiative, behaviour has improved, both in lessons and around the school. Pupils said that

there is a clearer and more consistent warning system, and pupils are required to amend unacceptable behaviour. In the lessons we visited, pupils displayed positive attitudes to learning. As a consequence of you raising the bar in terms of acceptable behaviour, the number of exclusions has risen significantly. It is important to reduce the levels of fixed-term and permanent exclusions so that the academy is closer to the national average.

External support

Leaders and teachers are supported effectively by being part of the Woodard Academies. The director of school improvement from the trust visits regularly to work with senior and middle leaders and has initiated reviews of the curriculum and the effectiveness of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) provision. Leaders from the trust monitor the impact of school leaders' actions and challenge them to improve the pace of progress. The trust supports the academy council in ensuring that its statutory obligations are met.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local board, the chief executive office of the Woodard Academies Trust, 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

Sir Robin Boshier

Ofsted Inspector