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Malcolm Christian
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Christian

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Hurst Community College

Following my visit to your school on 24 September 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 May 2013. 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:

- ensure that students who are entitled to the pupil premium or supported at school action make rapid progress and catch up with other students in the school.

Evidence

During the visit I met with you, other senior leaders, several governors and a representative from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. We made short visits to three mathematics lessons, one English lesson

and one science lesson. I had a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Governing Body. I reviewed the school action plan and the analysis of the 2013 examination results.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection one teacher has left the school and three teachers have been appointed.

Main findings

Since the section 5 inspection that took place in May, school leaders have taken swift and effective action to improve the systems they use to monitor teaching. Senior leaders' roles and responsibilities have been restructured to focus more precisely on the areas for improvement identified in the inspection. Sensibly, school leaders have been assigned to specific areas for improvement and their work is monitored carefully by a selected link governor.

Senior leaders have established a better approach to checking teaching and students' achievement. Students' progress is now measured more precisely and frequently during the year, so that any underachievement can be tackled quickly and gaps closed. Senior and middle leaders have introduced a thorough and comprehensive programme of monitoring, including unannounced visits to lessons, full reviews of subject areas and formal observations of teaching. A key priority to improve the school is to ensure that work in lessons is matched closely to each individual student's ability. Staff have received training to help them plan activities to challenge and meet the needs of every student. Action is taken on any teaching that is less than good: teachers have been set rigorous performance management targets and are closely monitored to check that their work improves.

School leaders had already begun working to improve achievement in mathematics before the section 5 inspection. Consequently, the 2013 examination results showed an encouraging improvement. Additional teaching staff and a specialist higher level teaching assistant have been appointed to the mathematics department in order to provide valuable extra support for students at risk of underachievement. School leaders have shrewdly revised the programmes of study in mathematics in order to strengthen students' basic number skills. Students in Years 7 and 8 who have not attained Level 4 are provided with extra lessons to ensure that they catch up rapidly with their peers. School leaders rightly recognise that they have to make further improvements to the consistency of marking in mathematics and also to ensure that information about students' current achievement is used effectively to plan lessons.

School leaders recognise that students eligible for the pupil premium and those supported at school action have not made enough progress. The gap between the achievement of these students and others in the school is too wide. Careful and strategic deployment of the best teachers for key groups is now in place and school

leaders have strengthened the programmes of extra help for those students at risk of underachievement.

Thorough and regular marking of students' work is correctly a key priority for the school. A new marking policy is in place outlining higher expectations. All students have been provided with a helpful presentation guide to encourage consistently neat and tidy work. Teachers are now using a common marking code to help students spell and punctuate correctly. Students now have access to homework tasks from the online virtual learning environment, which enables school leaders to check on the quality of homework more rigorously and efficiently. Students are expected to respond to teachers' written feedback and use a green pen to correct, redraft and improve their work. During the monitoring inspection visit students said that they are 'learning much faster and learning more' this year. Students like the green pen system and say that it helps them to learn by focusing really closely on what they need to do to make good progress.

Governors already had a good grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the school at the time of the section 5 inspection. They are acting even more incisively by linking governors with senior leaders responsible for each part of the school action plan. Governors participate in senior leaders' monitoring and continue to ask searching and challenging questions, holding the school to account for the new approaches.

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 regards the school as medium priority and has provided helpful challenge for school leaders and teachers. The school has made effective use of training from the advisory team for English and also for raising the achievement of those students entitled to the pupil premium. The local authority is planning to give further support for the school's work in mathematics and with students who have special educational needs.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce

Her Majesty's Inspector