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Stuart Reynolds
Headteacher
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Southchurch Boulevard
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SS2 4UY

Dear Mr Reynolds

Special measures monitoring inspection of Futures Community College

Following my visit with Neil Stanley, Additional Inspector, to your school on 4–5 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 school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report, which will be published on the Ofsted website, to the Secretary of State, the Education Funding Agency, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Southend on Sea.

Yours sincerely

Asyia Kazmi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching in order to raise standards and enable all groups of students to make at least expected progress in English and mathematics, by ensuring that:
 - teachers make effective use of assessment information and plan lessons that take account of what students know and can do, and what they need to improve
 - teaching in all subjects contributes to developing students' basic skills, particularly in writing
 - marking improves throughout the school to match the good practice which exists in some subjects.

- Strengthen the effectiveness of all leaders and the interim executive board by:
 - revising the systems for checking students' attainment and progress so they provide accurate information for use by students, teachers and leaders in planning for further improvement
 - evaluating the impact on achievement of all new initiatives and broadening the programmes of study in the sixth form
 - strengthening leadership in mathematics and science
 - ensuring teaching staff are suitably trained and reducing the number of cover and supply teachers used
 - improving systems for checking behaviour so that all students feel safe in school
 - ensuring that all staff implement the school's behaviour policy consistently
 - taking students' progress into account when evaluating the quality of teaching
 - ensuring that the interim executive board monitors the school's effectiveness and holds leaders and managers to account for students' attainment and progress.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 4 November 2014

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, visited lessons and evaluated learning in pupils' books. They scrutinised a wide range of documents including: the school's monitoring of its own work, pupils' progress data, records of meetings, behaviour logs and the single central record. Inspectors met with the headteacher, the executive headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers, groups of pupils and a representative from the local authority. A telephone meeting was held with the Chair of the Interim Executive Board.

There was a greater emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science in this monitoring inspection. The sixth form was not inspected on this visit.

Context

Eleven new teachers joined the school since the monitoring visit in June 2014. This represents nearly a quarter of the teaching workforce in the school and included a new assistant headteacher, and three new heads of department in mathematics, science and physical education.

Recent bad weather caused substantial flooding and has restricted access to certain parts of the school.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The 2014 examination results were weak. Only 16% of the students attained five GCSE passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics. This is well below the national level and well below teachers' prediction in many subjects. Contributory factors to this inadequate achievement are long-standing. They include poor teaching, including from many temporary teachers in the past, low expectation of what students could achieve and poor behaviour. Senior leaders have done much to address these inadequacies and achievement, although not consistently good across classes, is improving.

Students are now making more progress than before as can be seen in their books and in many lessons. They are currently tackling a range of topics pitched generally at the right level, including more demanding, higher-level work, particularly in Year 11. Students' progress is enhanced through the detailed marking, particularly in science, where many teachers are setting clear targets for students to which they frequently respond.

Specific initiatives to improve students' literacy are having an impact with a substantial proportion of students making rapid progress in their reading ages. Although good examples of written work were seen, students' writing across the school is not developed well. There are insufficient opportunities for extended writing, including in English, and poor quality written work is accepted across subjects. This is because a coherent plan for developing literacy across the school is not in place. In mathematics students are not challenged to show their working out properly which will hinder their chances of examination success. In science poorly articulated reasoning is too readily accepted.

Students in Key Stage 4 have a lot of catching up to do. However, learning in some lessons moves at a slow pace and, at other times, teachers move on too quickly before checking students have understood key concepts. In both these instances, students' learning is hindered.

A range of initiatives, such as mentoring by senior leaders and additional catch-up lessons after school as well as in holidays in core subjects, are all contributing to improved achievement.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving. The number of temporary teachers has drastically reduced and, apart from two teachers, all are permanent to the school. Teachers are regularly planning learning activities, pitching work generally at the right level. In the majority of cases good relationships between students and teachers are evident. Teachers are marking students' work much more regularly.

There are examples of excellent teaching across the core subjects which is accelerating pupils' learning. These are characterised by: high expectations, demanding subject content, rapid pace of learning with teaching structured to support students, within a short timeframe, to tackle difficult content on their own. However, weaknesses remain. Although teachers frequently ask students questions, they are too accepting of simple, superficial answers and do not challenge them enough. Teachers are not planning support for students who need additional help within lessons or extension for those who can learn at a faster pace. Additional adults in lessons are not deployed effectively.

In English, lessons are generally planned well and part of a clear sequence. However, in some classes there are limited opportunities for extended writing. Some teachers are setting work that is too easy or providing too much structure and direction which inhibits students' ability to tackle more challenging work without support.

In mathematics more students are now taught challenging work, pitched at the right level, which they grapple with seriously and with tenacity. Some teachers put good

emphasis on expecting students to explain their reasoning. Nevertheless, teachers have not fully planned for the amount of catching up students have to do and the need for rapid pace of learning. For example, too long is being spent unnecessarily on easy work in class.

Students' progress in science is more variable. One reason for this is that science teachers are not yet all skilled in managing students' behaviour which hinders learning. In some lessons students make rapid progress because teachers plan carefully the challenging work they want students to learn. In other lessons students' progress is limited because teachers accept superficial answers without challenging students to give more reasoned, extended responses.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is much improved. This is seen in the reduced number of exclusions, detentions and senior teachers being called out to lessons. Students report there is much greater consistency in how teachers tackle behaviour and that they can no longer 'get away' with unacceptable behaviour.

In several lessons there were examples of excellent behaviour and mature attitudes to learning. In these lessons students made rapid progress because they tackled difficult work with perseverance, and were confident in asking questions and discussing their mistakes. In other lessons students participate enthusiastically but have not yet developed the maturity to listen and learn from each other.

Not all teachers are yet skilled in managing low-level disruption or developing strategies to engage the minority of disengaged students. There remain a few lessons where behaviour is inadequate. Students are not yet taking pride in their exercise books, which too often are scruffy or have poor presentation.

Around the school students move sensibly and calmly. They report drastic reduction in bullying and bad language and much more confidence in staff in dealing with bullying were it to occur. Students are well presented, a high number choosing to wear the optional school uniform. Tutor times are now planned and some thoughtful discussions between students were seen. It is a credit to the school that the recent flooding did not cause disruption to their learning.

Attendance is improving, although remains below average. Too many families took children on unauthorised holidays, which is contributing to the low-attendance rate. The school is working with families and the local authority to seek solutions to this.

Students are very appreciative of the extra lessons teachers are running for them and of their one-to-one careers meeting, but would welcome more guidance and information on paths to take post-16.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders are ambitious for the school to improve, have high expectations and are setting a clear direction for staff. They are not hesitant in dealing robustly with weak performance and teachers are clearly held to account for the progress of their students.

Senior leaders have established a wide range of systems to improve teaching and learning. These include: training programmes, middle leaders' development programme, weekly departmental meetings, regular observations of teaching, book scrutinies, learning walks and daily pastoral meetings about individual students. Teachers are responding to the expectations placed on them and say they feel well supported. Actions to improve teaching are beginning to have an impact. Nevertheless, these systems are not yet refined enough to give good information about students' achievement. For example, the book scrutinies do not state which groups of students are making good progress and which are not. They do not give information on which areas of the curriculum or which skills students understand well and which need further teaching. This kind of subject-specific information is important in order to rapidly address gaps in learning.

New middle leaders are much more active in their departments and understand what needs to be done to improve teaching and learning. Their meetings are more focused on improving teaching and students' progress. They are identifying students who are underachieving and taking action to address this, rightly prioritising Year 11.

Detailed data are now available concerning behaviour and attendance which enable senior leaders to intervene with an effective range of strategies. Data systems to record students' progress have also been established but the accuracy of teachers' assessments is not yet confirmed. Therefore, the data cannot yet be relied on with confidence. This deficiency is a key issue and is being addressed in a range of ways. These include moving the mock Year 11 examinations to November and having these externally moderated. Senior leaders are also linking with other schools to ensure teachers assess students' work accurately. Nevertheless, this initiative was not done with the urgency that it should have been given this was a contributory factor to the poor 2014 GCSE results.

The Interim Executive Board, through monthly meetings, continues to hold senior leaders accountable for improvements in the school. Minutes of meetings show they are asking challenging questions. However, they have not demanded enough of senior leaders to demonstrate that students' achievement is improving and that data is accurate. Furthermore, they have not required verification of this data from sources other than the senior leaders themselves. The executive headteacher is maintaining his support for the school and visits frequently.

As advised at the last section 5 inspection, a review of how pupil premium funding has been spent was undertaken. However, this review was of very limited use and the school is rightly commissioning another one.

External support

The local authority has revised its statement of action which now makes clear what actions will be undertaken and when. It continues to provide support to the school, practically as well as financially, including support for improvement activities and work with other schools. An adviser visits the school and works regularly with departments. However, concerns about the accuracy of teachers' assessment last year were not picked up with sufficient speed nor was the school encouraged to address this fast enough. The school will need further support in challenging families who take children on holidays during school time.