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11 November 2014

Ms Fiona Deegan
Acting Principal
The Crest Academies
Crest Road
London
NW2 7SN

Dear Ms Deegan

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of The Crest Academies

Following my visit to your school on 11 November 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. 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 third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in June 2013. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academies are not making enough progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses, primarily because outcomes are too low.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Brent, the Education Funding Agency and the Academies Advisors Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2013

- Make sure that all teaching is good or better by:
 - checking that all teachers use what they know about students' knowledge and understanding to plan high-quality lessons which are challenging for all abilities
 - reducing the number of lessons taught by short-term teachers
 - building in activities which develop students' confidence and spoken fluency
 - marking students' work using a consistent approach which clearly identifies specific areas for improvement.
- Raise the achievement of all groups of students by:
 - improving the progress and attainment of students in the sixth form, especially at AS level
 - ensuring that all teachers have the highest expectations of what all students can achieve, eliminating inconsistencies in achievement between different groups and subjects.
- Strengthen leadership and management at all levels, making sure that:
 - information about the progress of different groups is checked accurately across all subjects and used to assess the impact of teaching on improving students' progress, particularly in the sixth form
 - students are given clear and high-quality guidance about courses in the sixth form which suit their particular needs.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 11 November 2013

Evidence

The inspector met with the senior leadership team and held separate meetings with the acting Principal, a group of middle leaders, a few teachers receiving support, a group of students from all year groups, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority; and with two representatives from E-ACT, the sponsor: the acting director of education and the head of secondary transformation. A telephone conversation was held with the headteacher of one of the partner schools. The inspection considered the merger of the boys' and girls' academies and different aspects of the academies' work, including the capacity of leaders and the role of the sponsor to sustain improvements over time. Short visits were made to seven lessons with the acting Principal.

The inspection considered a range of documents, including the single central record, the revised action plans from the academies and the sponsor, the draft report from the new local authority adviser, the behaviour log and attendance records, minutes of governors' meetings, analysis of recent examination results, scrutiny of students work, moderation of the academies work, and records of teaching and learning.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the Crest Boys' Academy closed at the end of the summer term 2014. The merger with the Crest Girls' Academies has led to the formation of The Crest Academies. The new building has been operational since the start of the autumn term. However, the previous site is still under construction as the old buildings are being demolished before landscaping is completed.

The Chair of the Governing Body handed in his resignation in July, followed by the Principal resigning during the summer holiday. The sponsor duly appointed the Vice-Principal to the interim position of acting Principal for one term. She will return to her former role when the newly appointed substantive Principal designate takes up the position in January 2015. A new Chair of the interim Governing Body was appointed in September 2014. Other key appointments include a new head of sixth form, the assistant director of inclusion, a systems leader principal and an associate principal. While the latter two started in November, the other appointees took up their appointments at the start of the current term. The systems leader principal is responsible for restructuring and ensuring that appropriate processes and systems are in place for staff at all levels for the smoothing running of the academies. The associate Vice-Principal is responsible for all matters relating to safeguarding.

The sponsor has brokered a new partnership work with Queens' School, rated as a good school in Hertfordshire local authority.

Altogether, 20 newly qualified teachers are in the new academies.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The close partnership work between the interim Principal and the sponsor has led to senior leaders revising and building on the earlier foundations to improve the academies. She has successfully held the academies together against a background of challenging circumstances. For example, the evident teamwork among senior leaders and the sponsors meant that the transition to the new but unfinished building was well managed at the start of the new term. Consequently, potential risks and difficulties were minimised and students could begin the new term with relative ease.

The 'new' academies have forged a strong partnership with the sponsor. As a result, they have adopted a coherent approach to improving the effectiveness of the academies. This has been possible because previous tensions have been consigned to the past. Better communications between all parties have led to systems and structures being reviewed and refined to meet the needs of the 'new' but unique academies. For example, the action plans have been revisited and dovetail well, particularly in relation to merging the weaknesses of the merged academies. The action plans are sharply focused on what needs to be done to drive improvement quickly. Unity of purpose is evident and clear quantifiable success criteria and milestones are outlined to evaluate actions taken.

Senior leaders, in consultation with the sponsor, in particular the head of secondary transformation, have increased the capacity of the senior leadership team. Experienced senior staff with proven track records have clear briefs within a given period to make changes. They have quickly identified inherent weaknesses in, for example, the sixth form curriculum, behaviour management, particularly in the boys' school, and developing middle leaders further. Suitable actions have been taken to begin addressing these weaknesses but it is too early to comment on the impact of recent changes to drive improvement.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Clear lines of accountability and monitoring of the work have been spelt out so that no member of staff is in doubt about requirements to drive improvement.
- Teachers spoken to say that have benefited from the coaching programme and support provided to develop their teaching. The one-to-one mentoring on, for example, classroom management has contributed to implementing and developing sound strategies to maintain discipline and engage students much more in their learning. Inspection evidence mostly supports this view.
- The partnership work with consultants from the outstanding school is helping to increase teachers' awareness of good practice.
- The sponsor is now more actively involved in the academies than previously. First, they are more visible and staff are benefiting from the corporate approach common to the E-ACT federation. A start has been made in rolling

out training, support and advice to, for example, middle leaders. Key subject leaders from English, mathematics and science have indicated that training and networking with their counterparts in the E-ACT trust are leading to sharing and developing good practice. Second, commissioned work to drive improvement has started. For example, systems for managing data have been streamlined and are reportedly manageable. Previous assessments based on predicted examination results were not all accurate and have led to current work being moderated externally to ensure greater accuracy. Third, for the first time, the level of challenge has increased through the setting up of the raising achievement board. The raising achievement board complements the local governing body. This layered approach has increased accountability and now includes a senior representative from the local authority.

- The governing body has been strengthened by the appointment of a new Chair of Governors who is steeped in education. The new Chair has quickly assessed the needs of the academies and outlined a sound recovery plan to ensure governors can be unremitting in driving improvement. Strategic changes include a planned review of the governing body, appointing a pupil premium champion and developing shadow structure.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The 2014 unvalidated examination GCSE results and AS-level results are too low and were the lowest achieved in the last three years. Only 32% of students achieved five or more GCSE A*-C grades, including English and mathematics.
- The courses offered in the sixth form are not well matched to the ability of all students. Consequently, too many are continuing to fail the more traditional academic subjects, particularly the sciences. The new head of sixth form has plans to raise the entry requirements and review the courses offered but it is too early to comment on the plans for improvement.
- Results in the AS-level examinations were low. At least 60% of students failed the science examinations. Senior leaders and the sponsors have responded quickly to the poor results through putting in better systems to moderate outcomes regularly and providing training for middle leaders.
- Behaviour management requires more work. Students do not all work engagingly in lessons, particularly in the boys' section of the academies.
- The design and technology suites are not all functional because the specialist rooms for product design are not ready. While suitable and temporary arrangements are in place for the current Year 11 to complete their GCSE practical work at Queens' School, other year groups cannot access the subject.
- Senior leaders are not yet well placed to manage without additional support in the 'new' academies. The recent turnover of a few senior leaders and the continuing difficulties with having one third of agency staff has affected the capacity of leaders to move forward at a quicker pace. The challenge for this new academy is to ensure that it can, within a limited time, sustain the recent

changes, and address low achievement and other weakness while developing its capacity without the support from partners and other services.

External support

The increased working relationship between the local authority and the academies has led the new link adviser providing additional critique with the academies now buying into the core offer. As reported in previous monitoring letters, the academies are maintaining the good partnership work with Highgate School and Brunel University to improve provision in science and mathematics.

The partnership work between the sponsor and the new leadership team has been restored and as a result, they are working well together to address the weaknesses identified.