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5 June 2015

Mohsen Ojja
Principal
The Crest Academies
Crest Road
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Dear Mr Ojja

Special measures monitoring inspection of The Crest Academies

Following my visit to your academy on 4 June 2015, 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 academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2015.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, the executive leadership team, the Chair of the Local Governing Body and a parent governor. In addition, a discussion was held with the director of education and education system leader from E-ACT, the sponsor to the academy. The sponsor's statement of action and the academy's post inspection action plan were evaluated. A range of information from the academy was reviewed including data on the progress made by students and records of the monitoring of teaching by senior leaders. A brief tour of the academy was conducted with visits to a number of classes. The academy's single central register was scrutinised.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, the academy has continued to receive considerable support from the sponsor. There have been significant changes in staffing. Since the inspection, 40 members of the teaching staff have left or will leave at the end of this term. This number includes 10 who were long-term supply teachers. Currently, 26 teaching staff have been appointed and have started at the academy or will begin by September. Two vice principals have been appointed and have joined the academy. With these two appointments the executive leadership team is complete and responsibilities for all leadership and management areas have been assigned. Recruitment to the next tier of leadership is almost complete with the senior leadership team made up of curriculum directors for subject groupings, leaders for inclusion and lead practitioners. All appointments to the senior leadership team will be completed by the end of term. However, there remain some teaching appointments to be made, particularly in mathematics and science.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

As Principal, you and the vice principal who was at the academy at the time of the inspection have worked swiftly to begin to address the areas for improvement. Your own determination to improve the quality of teaching and raise students' aspirations and achievement is very clear. Now that there is a full executive leadership team and other senior leaders have been appointed the academy is ready to build on the foundations laid in the post inspection action plan. This is a clear working document with comprehensive links to the areas for improvement from the last inspection. Actions undertaken are regularly monitored and evaluated.

Senior leaders have rightly focused on improving the quality of teaching. There is a regular cycle of observations which focus on class teaching, the progress made by students and the effectiveness of marking and feedback. This has raised expectations of the standards which are acceptable. Learning walks and lesson 'snap shots' reinforce the standards now required. There is a focus on lesson 'breakthroughs' whereby an aspect of teaching is evaluated and outcomes shared with all staff. To date, the way lessons begin and marking and feedback have been reviewed. Where teaching is not at least good, a short, sharply focused period of support is developed tailored to the needs of the individual teacher. If this does not lead to the required improvement, further more formal procedures are undertaken. Procedures such as these and the new direction for the academy have led to a sizeable proportion of teachers leaving. This has enabled the academy to recruit staff in order to fulfil the provision of a broad curriculum and, most importantly, focus on improving the quality of teaching across all age groups. Integral to this development is the creation of a learning and teaching team led by a vice principal.

This team includes lead practitioners for curriculum areas, most of whom have been appointed. In addition, staff within the team have specific responsibilities across the academy for aspects such as literacy and support for students for whom English is an additional language, the Crest Lesson Essentials, numeracy, marking and feedback and coaching for less experienced teachers. Despite these developments, senior leaders accept that there is still much more to do to ensure that all teaching is of a high quality, and consistently so. However, progress has been made. The academy's monitoring of teaching shows that there is a clear increase in the proportion judged good or better since the inspection. Marking and feedback to students generally follow the academy policy but this is not yet applied consistently across all age groups or subjects.

Mathematics remains fragile. A significant number of teachers from this curriculum area have left or are leaving shortly. A new curriculum director for the subject is to join the academy in July. In addition, the provision for post 16 students remains in a state of transition. The academy has worked with the sponsor to review the programmes of study offered and the match of courses to the individual needs and abilities of students. This has included specific support for teachers delivering post 16 courses. A new director for Key Stage 5 is to join the academy in September.

The academy is currently undertaking a consultation with parents and carers, students and staff regarding a review of the provision for boys and girls. This has a clear focus, quite rightly, on ensuring equality of opportunity in the curriculum for all. There are already assemblies and some aspects of personal, health and social education that involve boys and girls learning together.

As required by the last inspection, an external review of governance has been commissioned from the National Governors' Association and is scheduled for later this month. The local governing body is established with no vacancies. It continues to work in an integrated way with the sponsor. Since September 2014 a raising achievement board has been in place led by the sponsor. This group meets every six weeks to monitor progress and hold leaders to account; governors are part of this monitoring procedure. The local governing body also meets separately on a regular cycle. The Chair of the Governing Body is very experienced and was placed in the academy by the sponsor before the last inspection. Now that the senior leaders have been appointed, there are advanced plans to develop links between governors and senior leaders, curriculum areas and staff with responsibility for groups of students with particular needs.

The sponsor continues to monitor the progress at the academy closely. This takes the form of support and challenge from the education system leader appointed to the academy. The sponsor has also undertaken effective quality assurance for the

academy in relation to the programme for the monitoring of teaching. Since September 2014 the sponsor has brokered the support of an experienced headteacher of a high performing school, who is also a Local Leader in Education, to work with members of the senior leadership team. The sponsor also provides a range of support including personnel, finance and information technology. The main source of external challenge for academy leaders is through the regular raising achievement board meetings which are attended by senior leaders from the sponsor including its chief executive officer and chaired by the director of education. This level of challenge is imperative while the local governing body develops fully the necessary skills, knowledge and confidence to undertake this role independently.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The academy's post inspection action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that newly qualified teachers should only be appointed to curriculum areas where strong support for professional development can be assured and following discussion with HMI.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Education Funding Agency, the Chair of the Local Governing Body, the Chief Executive of E-ACT and the Director of Children's Services for Brent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Robert Pyner
Her Majesty's Inspector