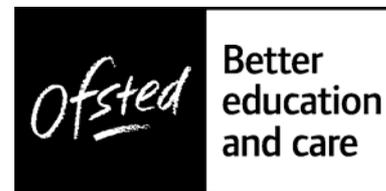


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Ms F Wright
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Wright

Implementation of Seaford Head Community College's Action Plan

Following the visit of Mr S Long HMI, Mr A Olive HMI, Mrs C Bolton HMI and Mr C Redman HMI to your college on 29 and 30 June 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings which are recorded in the attached note.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the college; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan.

The college has made limited progress since the last monitoring inspection and reasonable progress overall since being subject to special measures.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for East Sussex. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

IMPLEMENTATION OF SEAFORD HEAD COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S ACTION PLAN

Findings of the third monitoring inspection since the college became subject to special measures

During the visit 39 lessons or parts of lessons, three registration sessions, three tutor sessions and an assembly were inspected. Meetings were held with the executive principal, the chair and vice chair of governors, representatives from the LEA, and other senior and middle managers. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the executive principal and members of the senior leadership team, the chair and vice chair of governors, and representatives from the LEA.

In the spring term the principal restructured the senior leadership team. A substantive vice principal was appointed to start work at the beginning of the summer term; three new assistant vice-principals were appointed, drawn from within the college, and started work during the spring term and two supernumerary deputy headteachers, paid for by the LEA, left the college having completed their contracted periods of service. The principal then resigned from the college and left in early May. The LEA and governors acted swiftly to recruit a suitably qualified interim replacement who took up her post as executive principal at the beginning of June. The college was without a principal for about three weeks. A consultant vice principal from the LEA school improvement service has also been working at the college for three days per week during the summer term.

Delegated powers were returned to the governors in March of this year. Appropriate initial steps have been taken by the governors and the LEA to recruit a substantive principal at the earliest opportunity.

Fifteen teachers are leaving the college at the end of this term; a smaller number than in previous years. Six of those leaving have applied for, and been given, voluntary redundancy. Where necessary, informal and formal competency procedures have been taken with teaching staff.

Overall the standards in lessons were close to the level expected for each year group.

The pupils' standards in oracy were in line with national expectations. Many drew on a good range of vocabulary when speaking in large groups and made extended contributions to discussion. Listening skills were more varied; some of the pupils were eager to offer their own ideas but did not listen properly to those of others.

Some written work was of high quality in Key Stage 4; at best the pupils' writing was well planned, carefully presented and well matched to its purpose. Coursework files contained pieces demonstrating perceptive responses to reading. However, discussions with the same pupils indicated limited reading beyond the taught curriculum. Too many of the pupils gave insufficient thought to presentation and made careless errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar when writing.

Standards in mathematics are close to the average for the pupils' ages. Higher attaining pupils had good recall of basic number facts and used these well to solve problems. They identified patterns in numbers with average capacity but did not always check that their calculations were reasonable. Where the standards were below average, the pupils had weak recall of basic number facts. This restricted their progress because they did not understand crucial number patterns and could not apply their learning to new contexts.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in 32 lessons, including ten where it was good, two where it was very good and one where it was excellent. It was unsatisfactory in seven lessons. The proportion of teaching which was at least satisfactory was in-line with that seen on the last monitoring inspection; however the proportion of good or better teaching has fallen significantly.

The effective lessons reflected the training and development carried out by the college. Learning objectives were appropriate and were explained properly to the pupils. Activities were thoughtfully chosen to build on prior learning and to enable the pupils to apply their skills. The teachers had high expectations of what each of the pupils could achieve. Effective on-going and end-of-lesson assessment enabled both the teacher and the pupils to monitor progress against the learning objectives. The best teachers were able to adapt lesson content in the light of this assessment activity. Examples were seen of good questioning that targeted particular groups of pupils and enabled them to develop their understanding.

The unsatisfactory lessons, and some that were satisfactory overall but which contained weaknesses, shared a number of features. The planning did not identify specific learning objectives, or confused learning with tasks. Insufficient use was made of data concerning the pupils' prior attainment to plan properly for the full range of needs, particularly of the higher attaining pupils. In lessons the opening activities did not clarify the purpose of the lesson or provide a link to prior learning. Occasionally, the teachers' subject knowledge was inadequate, resulting in poor explanation and management of tasks. There were examples of the repetitive use of ineffective behaviour management strategies.

The quality of learning closely matched that of the teaching. It was satisfactory or better in 30 lessons, including nine where it was good, and three where it was very good. The pupils made the best progress when they were actively engaged in collaborative and practical tasks. Progress was limited when the pupils had to listen to teachers for too long or where significant numbers of the pupils took little part in the lesson; for example, in discussions, or where they were not properly monitored in relation to the amount of work they were doing.

The current practice, whereby the final ten minutes of some lessons is taught by a substitute teacher to enable the class teacher to transfer to the other college site for another teaching commitment, is unsatisfactory. It interrupts the pupils' learning and inhibits the assessment of their progress.

The sound systems for tracking the pupils' progress, and for setting targets for individual pupils and the whole college, were noted at the time of the last monitoring inspection. Most pupils were able to identify their targets but were generally less clear about what to do in order to reach them.

The quality of marking is inconsistent. Much of that seen lacked rigour and did not help the pupils improve their work. Some of the pupils' books had not been marked for a considerable period of time. The best marking gave guidance for improvement although the pupils did not routinely take sufficient action as a result of the teachers' comments.

The pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour were satisfactory or better in 34 lessons; they were good or better in 20. These figures are markedly below those observed during the previous monitoring inspection. The pupils responded enthusiastically to effective teaching but, where the teaching was less stimulating or unsatisfactory, most of the pupils were compliant, but some showed their boredom by misbehaving and indulging in distracting behaviour. In almost one in seven lessons, learning was disrupted by unsatisfactory behaviour.

Behaviour between lessons on both sites was good overall. The pupils moved around the buildings with due regard for each other and were often polite to those around them. They mostly spoke respectfully to adults, but one incident of disrespect to a member of staff was observed which was not appropriately dealt with.

Attendance for the college year to the end of May 2005 was 93.3 per cent; it was 92.9 per cent for the first day of the inspection. However, attendance was only 87.2 per cent in a sample of the lessons visited.

In a number of classrooms the environment for learning was unsatisfactory. Display space was not routinely used to celebrate the pupils' achievement or to exemplify different levels of attainment. Some classrooms were unkempt and a number were ineffectively ventilated. Display in corridors and public areas was of higher quality overall than that seen in classrooms; most, but not all, provided a sound educational resource.

The departure of the principal was unexpected and has hindered developments in leadership and management. Other senior leaders have worked hard to maintain progress with the action plan but the further change in principal and the restructuring of the senior leadership team has had a detrimental effect on the college's capacity to sustain strategic improvement. The executive principal has approached her work with determination having taken up her post under challenging circumstances. She is developing a more accurate understanding of strengths and weaknesses in provision; however, the self-evaluation provided is overly-reliant on assertion and contains insufficiently crisp judgements on the impact of initiatives. Improving teaching and learning have been identified as priorities by the executive principal. She has begun to take decisive action to tackle staff who have proven unresponsive to support and whose fulfilment of management roles, or whose teaching, remains unsatisfactory. The executive principal recognises that the staff, as a whole, does not have a shared understanding of what defines good or better teaching and learning, or of how to achieve it.

Quality assurance procedures have not been applied consistently so as to drive improvements across the college. The quality of middle management is too variable overall. Communication between year and subject leaders is sometimes unclear and does not focus sharply enough on improving achievement. Some subject leaders have a fragile grasp of the strategic actions necessary to raise standards and are not providing good models of teaching. Nevertheless examples of very good and excellent teaching were seen from senior staff.

The LEA has given sound support to the college since the last monitoring inspection; including an additional programme put in place on the resignation of the principal. Its monitoring procedures accurately reveal the progress being made by the college and the impact of LEA consultants on provision.

The college has received additional financial support from the LEA to overcome a projected budget deficit in the current financial year. The governors, together with senior staff, have worked with the LEA to ensure the long term financial security of the college.

The quality of governance is very good. Governors have provided energetic support to address significant issues such as leadership, the budget and monitoring progress against the action plan. They have ensured that their monitoring is based upon a wide range of evidence, including their own visits to see the college in session. As a result, their understanding of the college is unusually broad and well informed; this has helped them to hold the college to account while also fulfilling their role as critical friends. Communications between the governors, the staff of the college and parents are good.

Action taken to address the key issues

1: improve standards of attainment and achievement

Some appropriate measures have been implemented to raise attainment in the 2005 external examinations and tests; however, these have had insufficient impact and there is still too much underachievement at the college

At Key Stage 3, the college predicts that the results of the national tests in English will show a significant improvement on those in 2004 and will be in line with the target set in the action plan. Results in mathematics and science are expected to fall short of the targets. The pupils' attainment in information and communication technology is also below the level expected of this cohort of pupils.

The college predicts that 53 per cent of Year 11 pupils will achieve five or more A*-C grades and 93 per cent will achieve five or more A*-G grades in this summer's GCSE examinations. These figures replicate last year's disappointing results and are below the targets set in the action plan. The college also expects a worsening of the boys' performance in relation to that of the girls.

The college expects that the sixth form pupils, whose prior attainment was relatively weak, will achieve better results in 2005 than are predicted by the data from the A-level Information System.

Progress on this key issue has been limited.

2: improve the college's leadership and management at all levels

Appropriate steps have been taken to contain the difficulties arising from the unexpected change in the college's principal. The executive principal brings a good range of leadership experience which, together with the new vice principal and expanded senior team, offers the potential for enhanced capacity in leadership and management. Middle managers have continued to participate in a recognised training course and the senior leadership team has begun to plan for the college's

long-term development. However, leadership and management are not working cohesively enough at all levels and the impact on achievement has been limited.

Progress on this key issue has been limited.

3: improve the quality of teaching and learning

A sound programme of monitoring exists, ensuring that senior leaders have a reasonable understanding of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. There is an extensive teaching and learning development programme which includes whole-college implementation of national strategies, the identification of departmental areas for development and individual targets for teachers. The college rightly values the sharing of good practice and has implemented a peer mentoring scheme. The teaching and learning group has begun to consider how to address boys' underachievement. However, these actions have had a limited impact in making good or better teaching an embedded feature of the college.

Progress on this key issue has been limited.

4: improve the pupils' attitudes and behaviour

The college's systems for managing the pupils' behaviour are sound; there is an appropriate balance between sanctions and rewards but the implementation of these systems varies too widely. Many teachers used the rewards sensibly to reinforce appropriate behaviour, but some used them indiscriminately, negating their true purpose. The college is aware of these inconsistencies and is giving individual teachers support to comply with the valid philosophy underlying the behaviour management systems.

The number of exclusions during the current academic year is high; one in seven of the pupils have been excluded for at least a fixed-term during the year and seven pupils have been permanently excluded. The college has made reasonable arrangements to support those pupils who are at risk of exclusion. For example, eight Year 11 boys, who attended off-site provision with an amended curriculum, have successfully avoided exclusion since September 2004. A number of Key Stage 3 pupils have attended an inclusion unit where they followed aspects of their current curriculum and were helped to identify strategies to manage their behaviour. These arrangements have been thoughtfully reviewed and the college has appropriate plans to improve its provision for the pupils with the most challenging behaviour. The management of the work with pupils who have special education needs is to be restructured to ensure that the complex needs of individuals, including those whose behaviour is unsatisfactory, is understood and managed better. However, the new arrangements to address the most challenging

behaviour fall short of ensuring that the pupils continue with their studies and that they do not return to normal lessons until they understand fully how to manage their behaviour.

Progress on this key issue has been reasonable.

5: improve the quality of the partnership with parents and the community

A good range of initiatives has been taken to improve relationships with parents and the community. A parents' focus group meets to consider issues associated with the college. There is a well designed website to provide parents with information about the college. Several good initiatives have been instigated to involve the pupils with the local community; for example, writing for the local newspaper and interviewing members of the community about their experiences of World War II. The 207 returns to a recent parental satisfaction survey reflect parents' feelings that: most pupils enjoy learning at the college; the pupils are generally treated with respect by the staff; most parents are satisfied at being able to contact the college easily and most parents are confident that they will receive a response to the concerns they raise. However, there remain concerns about: unsatisfactory behaviour affecting learning; the support and guidance received by the pupils and the guidance provided to parents on how they can help their children learn.

The college is responding appropriately to the issues raised by parents and relationships with the community and the local press have improved significantly.

Progress on this key issue has been good.