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24 June 2013

Mr D Baker
Executive Headteacher
Abbeywood Community School
New Road
Stoke Gifford
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BS34 8SF

Dear Mr Baker

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Abbeywood Community School

Following my visit with Lorna Brackstone HMI to your school on 20 and 21 June 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the predecessor school was judged to be a school causing concern.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of information including student progress data and monitoring and evaluation documents. There were 27 observations of lessons and 23 of these were conducted jointly with senior leaders. Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, associate headteacher, senior and middle leaders, groups of students, the Chair of the Directors of the Olympus Academy Trust, the Chair of the Local Governing Body, governors, the school improvement adviser and the consultant inclusion coordinator.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all pupils.

Context

In January 2013, Abbeywood Community School became an academy sponsored by the Olympus Academy Trust. The Trust also manages Bradley Stoke Community School and the executive headteacher leads both schools. There has been a clear working relationship between the two schools since the executive headteacher was appointed to lead Abbeywood in October 2011, shortly before the last full inspection. The associate headteacher has been in post since September with the responsibility for the day-to-day management of the school, having transferred to the school during 2011/12 as deputy headteacher to support the executive headteacher. During the period leading up to the conversion to academy status this stable leadership and partnership with Bradley Stoke enabled the strengthening of senior and middle leadership roles at Abbeywood. This cohesive approach involving both schools has led to a smooth transition to academy status. Since January there has been a board of directors for the overall academy Trust, with the responsibility for the strategic direction of both schools, and a local governing body for each school.

Abbeywood is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. Most students are of White British heritage, with a lower-than-average proportion from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, students known to be eligible for free school meals or those with a parent or carer serving in the armed forces) is above the national average. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported at school action plus or with statements of special educational needs is below the national figure. The school runs a specialist Resource Base on behalf of the local authority. Although the number of students leaving or joining the school during this academic year is broadly balanced overall, there has been a significant influx of students in Years 9 and 10. At the end of this summer term, 12 staff will leave the school and 17 will join in September.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The GCSE results in 2012 for the predecessor school were the best in its history. Since conversion to academy status the school has continued to build on the foundations for improvement seen during 2011/12. This has focused on improving the system for tracking students' progress. The system is based on regular assessment of each student's attainment, and individual support for those who are underachieving. The school's progress tracking system is becoming more sophisticated and subject leaders of learning are more confident in the use and analysis of data. They are well supported by, and accountable to, senior leaders. Teachers, in turn, are regularly held to account for the progress made by the students in their classes. The culture of regular review of students' progress leading to precise interventions and challenge to improve learning is firmly established. Overall, the interventions to support students who are not making the progress that

they should be rigorous, timely and well coordinated. For example, support for reading involves a cohesive range of programmes with a number of activities relevant for particular age groups. These include the use of electronic readers, an accelerated reading project and focused small-group support for older students to encourage reading for pleasure. A more recent development is the introduction of an alerts system whereby parents and carers are informed when students are not making the progress that they should, particularly the more able. In addition, the students identified are involved in this alerts programme so that they are fully included in any personalised learning developed for them.

As a result of these tracking systems and interventions to support students the predictions for Year 11 in the 2013 GCSE examinations show significant improvement on the outcomes for the previous year. For example, the proportion of students expected to gain five good GCSEs including English and mathematics is 14% above the outcome for 2012 and above the school's challenging target. In terms of the proportion of students making expected progress from Year 7 to Year 11, the prediction for English shows a significant improvement on last year. Recent predictions for mathematics based on focused interventions show that the school is on course to meet its target. For Year 13 students, progress tracking data show they are on course to improve on overall performance compared with 2012. Generally, the progress made by boys and girls is similar in English and mathematics. However, the progress of students in receipt of pupil premium funding and of disabled students and those with special educational needs is slower than for all students. The school is working to improve progress for these students by better coordination of the different kinds of intervention and support it is currently using. These include family liaison work and support from the achievement coordinators in each year group. Next year this aspect of support work is to be coordinated by a member of the school's leadership team and is a main focus for the 2013/14 development plan.

The quality of teaching

Improvements in students' attainment and progress are the result of better teaching. Work to improve the quality of teaching began before the school converted to an academy and the system for monitoring and support is well established. Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching, and coaching and mentor support programmes are available. The 'drop-ins' by senior leaders provide clear indications of the effectiveness of aspects of teaching on which the school is focusing, for example questioning. Rapid support can then be provided if required. Data from the school show a clear trend of improvement in the proportion of good and better teaching. The inspection confirmed that there are models of strong teaching across a range of subjects. Strengths include teachers' subject knowledge which is used to ask challenging questions that enable students to think about and link aspects of their understanding. Overall, planning is effective, with strong links to assessment and challenging activities to reinforce learning. An example of this was in a class of Year 9 students in a science lesson who were researching biodiversity but had to

summarise information in only 14 words. Students found this challenging and thought provoking, with lively debate about what should be recorded. This approach heightened their understanding of the most important aspects of the topic. Many lessons move at a good pace and engage and develop the confidence of students. The pride that students have in their work, the quality of the resources available and the respect for others shown by all members of the school community help to reinforce spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Although there has been strong progress in addressing long-standing weaknesses in teaching, there is still work to do to ensure that it is consistently good or better. Where teaching is weaker there can be too much time spent by the teacher explaining the task and so the students do not get sufficient opportunities to practise and develop their skills and understanding. In these lessons the students can be passive and many 'switch off'. Sometimes activities can be too general and not sufficiently focused on challenging all ability groups.

Marking is regular and positive. The development of systems to involve students in responding to teachers' marking on a regular basis has been a focus for the school and there are some good examples seen in a number of subjects. These include students responding to the challenges set for them in marking at the end of units of work and quick responses to questions from teachers put on 'post-it notes' in books. However, overall, there remains some inconsistency in the teachers' use of marking and implementation of the school's policy.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Staff and students confirm that the school is a calm and purposeful community. The number of exclusions has significantly reduced over the last year. This is the result of the support for students which is thoughtfully planned to meet their individual needs and, where appropriate, carried out by support staff. Students who have joined the school in the older year groups, some with a history of difficulties in their previous schools, confirm that they are supported in meeting the school's clear expectations of behaviour and conduct. Typically, students are positive about their work and in lessons there is good behaviour in groups, paired work and practical sessions, as well as around the school. Improving attendance is rightly a priority for the school, particularly for older age groups. Systems are in place and understood, resulting in improvement during this year but the overall attendance rate is still short of the latest national figure for secondary schools.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since the academy opened, senior leaders' roles have been confirmed, including those of the executive headteacher and associate headteacher. The drive and vision of the executive headteacher and the effective support of the associate headteacher have been central to the improvements before and after academy conversion. Together with this, senior leadership roles continue to be developed at Abbeywood and across both the Olympus Academy Trust schools, for example the leadership of

the sixth forms and support for students with special educational needs. A strong and developing feature has been the role of leaders of learning taking greater responsibility and accountability for students' progress. Other roles have been developed to provide specific pastoral support, for example the Student Support Team, family support work and the year academic coordinators, but all with the central focus on improving students' attainment and progress. Further developments are planned for September but the culture of aspiration, greater expectation and participation by staff and students is firmly established. As the Chair of the Directors of the Olympus Academy Trust said, 'Staff are allowed to have creative ideas.' As a result, the school's self-evaluation is accurate and targets for improvement appropriate and challenging, leading to a strong capacity for improvement.

There was effective preparation for the changes in governance following conversion to academy status. As a result the roles and responsibilities for the board and local governing body are very clear. Governor responsibilities across the Trust were allocated based on an audit of skills. Governors from the local governing body have undertaken themed visits to the school and receive regular presentations from leaders of learning on achievement by year groups and other groups of students. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and play a full part in the development of improvement priorities.

External support

External support is effective. The school improvement adviser who worked with the predecessor school has continued to provide support and challenge since academy conversion. This has ensured continuity for the implementation and evaluation of improvement initiatives. A consultant for inclusion has been seconded to provide greater capacity for supporting disabled students and those with special educational needs. This is developing a greater focus on raising achievement.

Priorities for further improvement

There are no further priorities.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body, the local authority for South Gloucestershire, and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Robert Pyner
Her Majesty's Inspector