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4 June 2014

Mrs Jan Scott
Principal
Millbrook Academy
Mill Lane
Brockworth
Gloucester
GL3 4QF

Dear Mrs Scott

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Millbrook Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 3 June 2014, 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 Chief Inspector was concerned about behaviour at the academy.

Evidence

The inspector gathered a range of evidence including:

- observations of students' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons
- observations of students' behaviour throughout the day, including discussions with students
- scrutiny of documentary evidence
- discussions with leaders and staff.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time: Behaviour and safety requires improvement.

Context

Millbrook Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school with just under 600 students on roll, with around 100 in the sixth form. The proportions of students who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language are both below average. The proportion of students eligible for additional government funding known as pupil premium is significantly above the national average. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.

Students' attainment on entry to the academy is well below average. Many students enter the academy with very low reading ages, and weak literacy and numeracy skills. Significant numbers of students join the school in mid-year in all year groups. Many of these students have behavioural or other specific needs.

There have been extensive staff changes during this school year and more staff will leave at the end of this term. There have also been changes in the leadership of key subjects during the year, with more planned from the start of the next school year.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

While the behaviour of some students in lessons requires improvement, there have been clear improvements since the inspection of the academy in October 2013. Over the same period, there have been significant improvements in students' achievement, and the current Year 11 are on track to achieve well. The academy's information shows that these improvements are sustained with further improvements in the achievement of students currently in Year 10 and in lower years. These improvements in behaviour and achievement result from more good and better teaching; rapid interventions to deal with underachievement; more attention to monitoring students' attitudes to learning, and rewarding good attitudes and progress; more consistent use of a behaviour sanctions and rewards system; and strengthening subject leadership.

The recently introduced system for monitoring and rewarding students' attitudes to learning is integrated well with the procedures for tracking students' progress and achievement. Students' attendance has also improved, although there are still some concerns about students currently in Years 9 and 10. The academy's senior leaders fully recognise the link between students' attendance and their attitudes to learning; attendance and punctuality are included as key aspects of the system for monitoring students' attitudes.

The academy also makes better use of an 'internal exclusion' system that provides high-quality support for individual students. This helps them with their own behaviour, and provides a means to prevent poor behaviour disrupting the learning

of other students. As a result, the academy's use of fixed-term exclusions has fallen markedly.

When teaching is most effective, students show good attitudes to learning, are prepared well for the activity, work at a good pace, respond well to teachers' instructions and questions, and work well with each other; as a result, they make at least good progress. Students are fully aware of safe working practices and apply these well when necessary. However, the attitudes and behaviour of a small minority of students in too many lessons still requires improvement. Where poor behaviour was observed, it was often a consequence of weaknesses in planning and teaching. Those students showing poor behaviour were often unclear about what they were meant to be doing; had difficulty with the work because, for example, their low reading ages had not been taken into account; or were responding to provocations from other students that had not been dealt with effectively by the teacher. In these lessons, teachers had often used up all of the stages in the behaviour system within a short period from the start of the lesson.

In some cases, there is a tension between the approaches used to support individual students in helping them to manage their own behaviour and the use of the system of sanctions by some teachers. Some students are overly reliant on the support they receive in the 'inclusion room'. Some teachers are overly reliant on the sanctions system.

Senior leaders are fully aware of these weaknesses in teaching, and actions have been, or are being, taken. Some of these teachers are on individual support plans and others will leave the school at the end of the term. Some improvements in teaching are being tackled through well-targeted training and development for all teachers. Subject leadership has been strengthened to embed improvements in teaching further.

Students' conduct around the school is good. They show respect for each other and for adults in their manner and speech. They willingly engaged in conversations with the inspector, both formally and informally. They take pride in the academy uniform and dress smartly. They are clear that the culture of the academy promotes good attitudes and behaviour, and they are proud to be students at the academy. A minority do not show sufficient 'sense of urgency' when moving to lessons.

Students, and parents and carers, feel that behaviour has improved since the academy was opened, and since the last inspection. However, many students feel that behaviour in lessons could improve more quickly. All of the groups spoken to were clear that where behaviour was poor, there were weaknesses in how well the teachers dealt with this. They fully support what the Principal and other senior leaders are doing to improve teaching and have their say through 'student voice'.

Priorities for further improvement

- Build on existing good practice to ensure that all teachers plan activities that promote good attitudes and behaviour to reduce the use of the 'behaviour sanctions' so that they are only used when necessary.
- Focus the support for a small number of students more on integrating them back into lessons.
- Ensure that the good procedures for monitoring and improving students' attitudes to learning are linked to the existing good arrangements for tracking their progress and achievement. Ensure that these are fully and effectively implemented across all aspects of the school as quickly as possible.
- Ensure further improvements in students' attendance, particularly for those currently in Years 9 and 10.

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

Yours sincerely

James Sage
Her Majesty's Inspector