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27 June 2014

Mrs Nikki Knight
Headteacher
Rydens Enterprise School and Sixth Form College
Hersham Road
Walton-on-Thames
KT12 5PY

Dear Mrs Knight

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Rydens Enterprise School and Sixth Form College

Following my visit to your school on 26 June, 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 school.

Evidence

Inspectors gathered a range of evidence including:

- observations of pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons
- observations of pupils' behaviour throughout the day, including discussion with pupils
- 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 require improvement.

Context

Rydens Enterprise School and Sixth Form College is a slightly-larger-than-average sized school, with an average proportion of students who are eligible for additional free school meals funding. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups in the school is similar to the national average. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported at school action is slightly above average. The proportion of students at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is slightly above average.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Leaders have improved behaviour at the school. Behaviour around the site is better and the school keeps its students safe. However, the behaviour of students in lessons still requires improvement.

Most students arrive punctually to school and staff are around the site to hurry along the small numbers of late-comers. Students enter and leave the school in a calm and orderly fashion. Parents collecting their youngsters confirmed that the behaviour of students leaving school is usually good. Students feel safe on their journey to and from school. There is a highly visible staff presence outside the school and at the bus queue to ensure good behaviour.

At break and lunchtime behaviour is good. It is a large site and students enjoy the range of different areas where they can relax, including picnic tables and a big field where football is played. The outside environment with its different leisure areas supports good behaviour. Staff are very visible across the school site at break and lunchtime and encourage good behaviour through positive relationships. There is a lunchtime club overseen by teaching assistants for students who prefer to socialise in smaller groups. This contributes positively to the safety of more vulnerable students.

There is a small amount of litter after lunchtime but students volunteer to pick it up in tutorial time. Although this does show some students take pride in their school, this is not consistently the case. A number of classrooms are very untidy and some wall displays are scruffy. However, students that I spoke to unanimously confirmed that they feel safe around school and there were no areas of the site that are too intimidating for them to venture into.

Behaviour in lessons requires improvement. This is largely due to teachers failing to consistently adhere to the high standards laid down in the school's own policies. In a small number of lessons students talk while teachers are giving instructions but this is not routinely challenged by staff. In a number of lessons visited, students did not make any attempt to do the work set but chatted instead. This was ignored by teachers or tackled in a half-hearted manner. In several classes, the presentation of work in books is poor and requires improvement. Teachers' comments do not routinely show that they expect better. Some pupils have graffiti on their book covers and inside their books.

In some lessons students are highly self-motivated to learn. They work well on their own and stay focused when working in larger groups. However, teachers sometimes pay insufficient attention to developing students' work ethic. As a result, learners do not challenge themselves to do better. Occasionally, students opt out of learning altogether but they do not necessarily disrupt others. In one or two lessons visited, students had their heads resting on their desks. However, in better lessons teachers are applying the agreed policies to good effect and students are challenged when they use inappropriate language or when they do not show commitment to their own learning. Students confirmed the inconsistencies in the expectations staff have of their conduct and self-motivation in lessons. One student remarked, 'We want strict and fair teachers more than anything else.'

Students register in mixed-age tutor groups. Some teachers use the afternoon tutor time in a highly effective manner to drum up support for school events or reinforce literacy skills. However some tutors accept very low standards of behaviour. In a small minority of classes students show an obvious lack of respect for their teacher. This is not helped by the fact that a small number of form tutors pay them very little attention. While some form tutors work in a highly personal way with their tutees others focus their attention elsewhere. This is a missed opportunity to ensure students are well focused for the afternoon's learning.

The school's own information shows the number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen this year. The information also shows a reduction for students who benefit from additional 'pupil premium' funding. Leaders have made good use of the inclusion room (an isolation room for serious behaviour breaches) and the cottage where students are supported in improving their behaviour. The cottage provides very good support to students who are at risk of being excluded.

The inclusion leader has established very clear expectations for how students behave in the cottage. She has worked effectively with external agencies to ensure students who need support in maintaining good emotional health access the care they need. As a result, this provision makes a positive contribution to reducing the number of fixed-term exclusions. Although the use of the inclusion room is also helping reduce exclusions, the expectations of this room are not consistently reinforced. When the inclusion room was visited, students were not silent and a small number were arguing with the member of staff supervising the room. As a result of these inconsistencies, the inclusion room is not as much of a deterrent as it might be. Breaches in students' conduct while they are in the room rightly mean they spend another day in there.

The school's leaders have robust plans for next term to ensure teachers are more accountable for the behaviour in their lessons. They are determined to make improvements and have an accurate view of where the strengths and weaknesses in behaviour lie.

Priorities for further improvement

- Make sure everyone, including new staff, upholds the same high standards of behaviour in lessons.
- Share the effective approaches to managing behaviour used in the cottage with classroom teachers.
- Ensure that policies for encouraging students to have greater self-motivation and to take more responsibility for their own learning are consistently applied.
- Make expectations clearer about the behaviour in the inclusion room and check regularly that these expectations are being met.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector