

Tribal
Kings Orchard
1 Queen Street
Bristol, BS2 0HQ

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T: 0117 311 5323
Email: suzy.smith@tribalgroup.com

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Ms Jo Halliday
The Headteacher
King Alfred's
Portway
Wantage
Oxfordshire
OX12 9BY

Dear Ms Halliday

No formal designation monitoring inspection of King Alfred's

Following my visit with additional inspectors Allan Barfoot, Gordon Jackson, Lesley Voaden and Jo Peach to your academy on 17 and 18 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because the Chief Inspector was concerned about the management of behaviour, the achievement of underprivileged students in mathematics, and achievement generally in science.

Evidence

Inspectors observed 34 lessons. Four of these observations were undertaken jointly with the headteacher. Inspectors also made brief visits to a number of lessons to look at behaviour. Inspectors visited two assemblies and spoke to students at break and lunchtimes. Inspectors analysed 239 responses from parents to the online questionnaire (Parent View). Meetings were held with four groups of students, the headteacher and other senior leaders, middle leaders, members of the governing body and directors of the Vale Academy Trust. Inspectors considered a range of documentary evidence provided by the academy, including information about the progress of students, the academy's own checks on how well it is doing, the academy improvement plan, attendance records and logs of behavioural incidents. An inspector examined a number of case studies of students who have received support for behaviour. Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements.

Context

King Alfred's is part of the Vale Academy Trust, which also includes two local primary schools. The academy is significantly larger than most secondary schools, with approximately 1,800 students on roll, 400 of whom are in the sixth form. The academy operates across three sites which are approximately a mile away from each other. Since 2005 the academy has operated a 'condensed' Key Stage 3, consisting of Years 7 and 8, so that students begin their Key Stage 4 courses in Year 9. The proportion of students supported by pupil premium funding (additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) is below the national average, but has risen significantly since 2011. The proportion of students who are disabled or have special educational needs and are supported by school action is below the national average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is in line with the national average.

The deputy headteacher was appointed as headteacher of the academy in July 2014.

On the second day of the inspection Year 6 pupils from local primary schools were visiting the academy.

Behaviour

The academy has clear and effective guidelines for managing behaviour which are used consistently by all adults. As a result, students have an excellent understanding of what is expected of them and the impact that poor behaviour has on learning. Students who spoke to inspectors talked with maturity about being responsible for their own behaviour. They said that lessons are very rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. Staff at all levels promote the highest standards of behaviour, respect and courtesy, and act as excellent role models to students. Relationships between students and adults are extremely positive and students value the praise and support given to them by their teachers. Adults use every opportunity to reinforce the positive values and ethos of the school. For example, a Years 7 and 8 assembly focused on the importance of 'being involved' and 'being interested'.

Students work purposefully on tasks and enjoy taking part in lessons. Nearly all students respond quickly to instructions from teachers. Students approach their work with diligence and concentrate on producing their best work. Students work equally well alone, in pairs or in groups. During lessons, they support each other to behave well and to make suggestions to improve each other's work.

Students' conduct around the school is outstanding. The students respect and care for the school environment and there is no graffiti or litter. They move around the school in a calm and orderly way and socialise at break and lunchtimes sensibly. Students enjoy each other's company in social areas, showing maturity at all times. Students are friendly and courteous towards staff and visitors. They frequently said

'good morning' to inspectors, held doors open for them and thanked them when they were asked for their views and opinions. Students wear their uniform smartly and are proud to be part of the academy. Older students regularly look after younger students. For example, sixth formers supervised the entrance of younger students into the dining hall and took the opportunity to engage in conversation with them about their lessons earlier in the day.

Senior leaders and governors are continually evaluating and improving the academy's approach to behaviour management. Leaders have recognised that an increasing number of students join the academy with varied and complex needs. As a result, they have introduced an electronic system to log and track incidents of poor behaviour. This information is used quickly and effectively to give a wide range of targeted and individualised support to students and their families. The school makes excellent use of outside support agencies, such as health professionals, to help students whose behaviour is sometimes challenging. Additionally, senior leaders have reviewed and revised the subjects that are offered to students. As a result, students are given every opportunity to access help and support and to excel at what they are good at. Detailed behaviour logs are meticulously maintained and checked frequently by senior leaders. Records show the number of exclusions is low, and declining. There is comprehensive and detailed evidence to show that incidents of behaviour causing concern are followed up by senior leaders and governors, including communications with parents. A significant majority of parents who responded to Parent View felt that behaviour was well managed at the academy.

Students say they feel safe in the academy. They are confident that adults will help and support them with their concerns. The academy provides access to a wide range of specialist professionals; for example, it employs its own student counsellor. Students show an excellent understanding of how bullying behaviour affects others and the various forms it can take. They say that bullying is very rare and academy records endorse this view, but if it does occur it is dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff. Students know that staff would challenge those who use derogatory language. Staff follow the procedures for recording any incidents of poor behaviour or any accidents that may happen.

Achievement

The academy has taken effective steps to improve achievement in mathematics for students in receipt of pupil premium funding, and to boost students' progress in science.

The proportion of students eligible for pupil premium making expected and more than expected progress in mathematics has risen. The gap between the progress these students make and that made by their classmates has closed significantly in the last two years. In lessons these students make the same progress as their peers and produce work of a similar quality. A variety of effective strategies have been introduced by senior leaders to support these students, for example extra classes

during school holidays and the introduction of 'learning mentors' to work alongside teachers as additional adults in classrooms. As a result, students receive carefully planned and targeted help in a range of subjects. Teachers and learning mentors across the academy share information about which type of help is most effective for students, so that extra support is carefully tailored to the needs of students.

The achievement and progress of pupil premium students have been made a priority by senior leaders. As a result, all teaching staff have targets for their performance management that are linked to how well these students in their class do. Additionally, the progress these students make is a key focus when leaders check the quality of teaching and learning, for example during lesson observations. Consequently, the importance and profile of this group of students has been raised across the academy. However, inconsistencies remain about how well some teachers know the pupil premium students in their class and use this information to plan appropriately to meet the needs of this group of students.

Subject leaders for mathematics and English are both members of the senior leadership team and have responsibility to develop teaching and learning across the school. They work closely together in order to share information about effective teaching and support for students so as to prevent underachievement.

The decline in results in science has been halted and reversed. Examination results for 2014 show the proportion of students achieving an A* to C grade at GCSE has improved and is significantly above national levels. This is because students are receiving effective targeted support and the standard of teaching has improved. Additionally, the science department was restructured last year so that several members of the department now have leadership responsibilities. This has enabled staff to make important and necessary changes to how the department operates in order to improve results.

External support

Working with other local schools in the Oxfordshire Teaching Alliance, the academy has recently undergone two reviews to measure progress against the academy development plan. This has helped senior leaders to refine and re-focus their future plans.

The academy employs an external consultant to provide useful bespoke coaching support for middle leaders. This is building capacity across the academy for improvement.

Priorities for further improvement

- Make sure that all staff know who the pupil premium students are in their class so they can support them effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Lisa Moore

Her Majesty's Inspector