

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

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

Direct Telephone: 0121 679 9163
Direct Email: lewis.mackie1@serco.com



26 November 2014

Mr Edward Gaynor
Headteacher
The Astley Cooper School
St Agnell's Lane
Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire
HP2 7HL

Dear Mr Gaynor

No formal designation monitoring inspection of The Astley Cooper School

Following my visit to your school on 25 November 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss behaviour at the school.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the 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 considered evidence including:

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

Having evaluated all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers have taken effective action to improve behaviour and secure consistently positive attitudes to learning.

Context

The Astley Cooper School is a smaller than average-sized secondary school, with a small sixth form. The number of students eligible for the pupil premium (extra government funding to support particular groups of students) is higher than average. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is average. The proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language are in line with national figures. The proportion of students who join or leave the school other than at usual transfer times is well above the national average.

Behaviour and safety of students

The school has prioritised improving attendance in its development planning and has taken effective action to reduce absence. All students are given individual attendance targets and students know how their own attendance compares to these. The importance of good attendance and the latest information about levels of absence in each year group are a regular focus in assemblies. Last year the attendance of students at the school was in line with the national average for the first time and has continued to improve this year. Persistent absence has also declined and last year was only slightly above national levels. Students are usually punctual arriving to school in the morning. However, they do not always move to lessons between periods and after break or lunchtimes as quickly as they could unless directed to do so by staff.

Students move around the corridors, classrooms and staircases calmly and sensibly. Students are courteous and friendly to adults and each other. They hold doors open for staff and their classmates without being asked. They look after the site well and do not drop much litter. Breaks and lunchtimes are well supervised by adults. This year the school has increased the range of locations accessible to students during lunchtimes, including opening up a 'common room' for Year 11 and the inclusion centre for vulnerable students. This has helped reduce the number of incidents of poor behaviour at lunchtime.

School leaders have strengthened the school's 'on-call' system so the presence of senior staff on duty during lesson times is highly visible to staff and students alike. As a result, the numbers of students who have to be removed from lessons has declined sharply. This year there has been a new emphasis upon positive rewards for good conduct alongside effective sanctions for poor behaviour and this has had a positive impact on student attitudes, particularly in Key Stage 3.

Students explained that they feel safe in all areas of the school and if any issues arise they feel confident that adults will listen and take appropriate action. Students reported that bullying in the school is very rare but when it occurs it is dealt with very seriously and effectively, and this view is supported by evidence in the school's careful record keeping of such incidents. The school uses an isolation room to help improve the behaviour of students who need to be temporarily removed from mainstream lessons. These students are very well supported by staff and care is taken to ensure their swift and successful reintegration into normal lessons.

The expectations of school leaders about the appearance and behaviour of students are communicated very clearly to students and staff and, as a result, most students

wear their uniforms smartly and behave well. Students who arrive at school in incorrect uniform have to report to the school's inclusion unit to ensure that any issues are addressed before they return to lessons.

Staff within the school's inclusion unit are working increasingly effectively with students to help them understand the causes of their poor behaviour and to equip them with strategies to help them behave well. As a consequence the number of students who receive fixed-term exclusions is declining. However, the proportion of students who are temporarily excluded from school was still above the national average last year and has not declined rapidly enough this year.

Students' attitudes to their learning are becoming increasingly positive. They routinely bring the correct equipment to lessons. They listen attentively to teacher explanations and lessons are routinely purposeful and productive. The attitudes of students in Key Stage 3 are no longer notably less positive than those of Key Stage 4 students, as had been identified during the last inspection. School leaders now ensure that every lesson observation they undertake results in a judgement about behaviour and the data generated is systematically analysed. This analysis shows that behaviour in lessons is improving.

School leaders have introduced other changes to help promote constructive attitudes to learning. For example, every Tuesday all students in the school undertake half an hour of silent personal reading. This is completed impeccably by students in all key stages. Students say that this has helped them to develop not only their reading skills but also their ability to concentrate for extended periods, and this is increasingly evident in lessons. Students do not, however, routinely take enough care with the presentation of their work and staff do not consistently apply the school presentation policy to help students develop a more meticulous attitude to producing high-quality written work.

Priorities for further improvement

- Reduce fixed-term exclusions further.
- Ensure that students move swiftly to their lessons between periods and after break and lunchtime.
- Ensure that students consistently present their work carefully.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire and the Chair of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Lawrence

Associate Inspector