

Tribal
Kings Orchard
One 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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Mrs Fiona Froment
Principal
The Aylesbury Vale Academy
Paradise Orchard
Aylesbury
HP18 0WS

Dear Mrs Froment

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Aylesbury Vale Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 11 December 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- ensure plans detail the way that work set will meet the needs of all students
- ensure subject leaders pay greater attention to the progress of less and more-able students when they evaluate the quality of teaching in their department.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the executive principal, the vice principal, the assistant principal responsible for attendance, a group of middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the Oxford

Diocesan Board of Education (your sponsor), to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated your improvement plans. You accompanied me on short visits to classes in English and mathematics.

Context

The head of mathematics is leaving at the end of this term; a new head of mathematics has been appointed for January 2015. The vice principal with responsibility for behaviour is leaving at the end of term.

Main findings

You are resolute in your determination to improve the academy. As a result of the well-prioritised actions you are taking, the academy is moving in the right direction. Your new vice principal has sensibly introduced a progress plan for each subject which outlines students' intended learning for the term. Leaders regularly check on the quality of teaching and their findings are usefully used by you in verifying whether these plans are being implemented. You know these plans vary in quality and senior leaders are helping some subject leaders to improve them so higher level skills are identified more clearly.

Senior leaders now have a common format for the meetings they hold with subject leaders. As a result these meetings have a more consistent focus on students' achievement. Senior leaders rightly use the progress plans to hold subject leaders to account for the impact of teaching on students' progress.

The executive principal has trained subject leaders to support and challenge the teachers they manage more effectively. As a result subject leaders hold teachers to account for the slower progress of some students with increasing consistency. Subject leaders are becoming more accurate in evaluating teaching because lesson observations are conducted alongside senior leaders. However, these leaders are not yet placing sufficient emphasis on whether all students in the class are making progress over time. In some classes, students who have quickly moved ahead with their work are not being challenged to extend their learning. Similarly in a minority of classes in mathematics, lower attaining students were not given tasks which they could successfully and usefully complete independently. They were too reliant on the teachers' help and their progress was slowed down by waiting for the teacher to come over to help them.

Predicted grades remain ambitious but are now logically based on students' performance in practice tests and examinations. Your predictions show that a sizeable number of students who are predicted to achieve a C grade in English may not achieve it in mathematics and vice versa. You have rightly organised extra support for these students and are monitoring their progress carefully.

The assistant vice principal is monitoring students' attendance carefully and attendance is improving as a result. Fixed penalty notices have been used successfully to improve the attendance of students who are persistently absent. The vice principal has collated information on attendance so that the attendance of different year groups and student groups can be more easily monitored.

The governors have tasked the advisor from the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education to monitor the quality of teaching and provide them with updates. This means they obtain a clearer picture of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching while maintaining enough distance to oversee improvements at a strategic level. As a result they have been robust in challenging the principal and the senior leaders to make improvements in a timely manner.

External support

The executive headteacher works part-time in the academy and is also the headteacher of a local outstanding school and a National Lead in Education (NLE). She works closely with the advisor from the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education to dovetail the work they do. The executive principal has developed and challenged senior leaders effectively. She acknowledges that there is still more to do in this area. She plans to work with leaders to support them in managing behaviour next term, after the departure of the vice principal with responsibility for behaviour.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Buckinghamshire, the Education Funding Agency and the Academies Advisors Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector