

20 January 2015

Mrs Nicole Gibbon
Acting Principal
St Aidan's Church of England Academy
Hundens Lane
Darlington
DL1 1LL

Dear Mrs Gibbon

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of St Aidan's Church of England Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 19 January 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the academy's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses in October 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the acting Principal, the Chair of the Governing Body and representatives of the sponsors, including their education lead. Meetings were also held with the whole staff and with the Senior Student Leadership team, a group of six Year 11 students. The sponsors' statement of action and the academy's action plans were evaluated.

Context

Since the recent section 5 inspection, the Principal and nominated deputy Principal have been absent from the academy and an acting Principal has been very recently appointed. This role has been supported by a range of senior staff from other Church of England academies in the area.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

- Since her appointment in early December 2014, the acting Principal, with effective support from the governing body, the sponsors and the Diocese of Durham, has responded effectively to address the findings from the recent inspection. The academy is now taking appropriate action to address the points for improvement identified in the recent inspection report.
- The academy's action plan provides clear strategic direction for the work being done and contains appropriate benchmarks to check on progress. However, the plan does not identify clearly who is responsible for leading each action and who is responsible for assessing the impact of these actions.
- Students report that there has been a significant improvement in behaviour at the academy. This is because the acting Principal, working with her team, has introduced a clear and robustly monitored approach to behaviour management.
- Leaders and governors at the academy are introducing a more robust approach to the management of teachers' performance. This links teachers' personal targets for improvement more closely with the needs of the students at the academy. It is too early to say whether this development is having the desired positive impact on the quality of teaching. The governing body, working with senior leaders, should ensure that it monitors this work carefully.
- The roles of middle leaders still need further development. Middle leaders are now more closely involved in monitoring the work of teachers and other adults in their teams. However, more needs to be done to ensure that middle leaders have the skills to hold teams and individual staff members to account for the quality of their work.
- Leaders introduced a more robust approach to marking and feedback in December 2014. This is now beginning to have an impact on the academy. Students report that they welcome the opportunities that this gives them to understand what they need to do to improve their work.
- The academy has placed particular emphasis on the needs of the current Year 11 students. These students have noticed this and welcome the increased opportunities they have to discuss and improve their work. For example, a recent after-school revision class offered by staff was attended by almost all students.
- Leaders at the academy are beginning to engage more carefully with parents and families to help ensure that they are offering an appropriate service. Although it is too early to say, early indications are that parents welcome this move. A recent information evening aimed at Year 11 students and parents was well attended.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The academy's improvement action plan is fit for purpose

The sponsors' statement of action is fit for purpose

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education at the Church of England Diocese of Durham and the Director of Children's Services for Darlington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Evans

Her Majesty's Inspector