

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 T 0121 679 9165
Direct email: victoria.mortimore2@serco.com



30 January 2015

Sarah Wilson
Acting Principal
Sawtry Community College
Fen Lane
Sawtry
Huntingdon
PE28 5TQ

Dear Mrs Wilson

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sawtry Community College

Following my visit with Jenny Usher and Hugh Betterton, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 28 and 29 January 2015, 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 the actions which have been taken since the academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

The academy is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The academy may appoint NQTs.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in June 2014

- Urgently ensure all safeguarding and health and safety requirements are fully met.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring self-evaluation is firmly based on the impact of actions taken by all leaders on the quality of provision, outcomes and leadership
 - ensuring the governing body is effective in meeting its statutory duties
 - ensuring all members of the governing body are given training to support them in questioning and challenging the judgements of senior leaders and in using a wide range of evidence in order to be convinced of the academy's effectiveness
 - ensuring senior leaders have robust procedures in place to track and evaluate the support provided for students who need additional support, improving staff morale and ensuring that they all feel fully supported in all aspects of their work.
- Raise overall achievement by:
 - embedding the systems for setting targets for students and tracking their progress towards those targets
 - ensuring the remaining gaps between the achievement of different groups in the academy close.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - extending to all subjects the good practice that has successfully raised achievement in English, mathematics and science
 - improving teachers' skills in questioning students so that all make good progress in lessons
 - developing teachers' skills in communicating what students will learn so they better understand the aims and purpose of each activity ensuring teachers provide sufficient challenge for students in their work
 - ensuring the good practice that has developed in marking in some subject areas becomes standard practice across the academy.
- Improve the behaviour and safety of students by:
 - improving the systems for recording and monitoring the progress and welfare of vulnerable students
 - providing all staff with the help they need to apply the behaviour policy consistently, including reporting incidents
 - sharpening the work on preventing bullying so that students not only understand the issues, but also how to deal with the effects and all students are confident that by reporting bullying incidents these will be tackled
 - improving attendance, including the systems for alerting parents when children are absent.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 28-29 January 2015.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Acting Principal, senior leaders, subject leaders for English and mathematics, five support staff, several groups of students and the Executive Principal of the Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust, who is also a governor.

Context

Four teachers have joined the academy since the last visit: two in the science department and one in mathematics; a new coordinator for special educational needs (SENCO) has also taken up post. Two new staff governors have joined the governing body. The academy continues to attract close scrutiny from outside agencies. A Department for Education (DfE) inspection recently evaluated the quality of the academy's provision. Plans for the academy to join the Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust are well advanced.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The academy has developed and embedded its new systems for target setting, a key priority from the inspection in June. Assessment information is efficiently collated, analysed and shared so that teachers and leaders at all levels can check the progress of key groups of students, identify individuals who are falling behind and take steps to rectify matters. Students are aware of their minimum target grades and know whether they are on track. Year 11 students targeted for additional support testified to its efficacy, and appreciate the guidance they receive.

The new data system enables leaders to analyse patterns of performance 'at the press of a button'. This alone does not solve the problem, but teachers are more acutely aware of their specific responsibilities in regard to students who fall behind, and the academy is using data effectively to ensure that interventions take place. In the past there have been wide gaps in attainment, notably for boys and for students who are disadvantaged. Leaders monitor closely the progress of key groups, but it is still the case that the students most likely to underachieve are most represented in classes of lower-attaining students, and almost all of the 11 students on alternative provision are eligible for pupil premium funding. The academy has reviewed all the alternative provision placements this year and has rightly tightened procedures for monitoring attendance and students' achievement.

The quality of teaching

Although teaching is improving steadily, this inspection found wide variation in the quality of teaching and learning, much wider than reported in the recent DfE visit.

Much of the teaching observed was confident and highly effective, but weaknesses identified previously still persist. Inspectors observed some excellent learning, including in some sixth-form lessons, but also found evidence of inadequate learning and progress. Some work lacks challenge, some is slow paced and in some groups only a minority of students work hard.

The best teaching is rooted in high-quality exposition and good behaviour management, but students make the most rapid progress when skilful questioning and carefully devised activities ensure that there is 'nowhere to hide' in the lesson. Planning a wider range of learning activities is a feature of staff training, and the impact of this work can be seen across different subjects. Well-prepared group work, for example, elicited a hubbub of conversation and promoted lively discussion. This activity enabled students to be well informed and confident when responding to the teacher's questions in English, history, design and information and communication technology (ICT) lessons. One positive indication of high-quality learning was that students in some lessons were asking, as well as answering, questions because their curiosity was aroused and they wanted to learn more.

Too often, however, students are expected to learn by listening attentively to the teacher for long periods of time, and the mumbled responses of their classmates. Students are generally patient and compliant but laboured questioning or poor behaviour management mean that students, who so choose, can do very little during the course of a lesson.

In general, marking supports students' learning well: teachers are encouraging and often pinpoint specific things to improve. The science marking template, with 'wow, how and now', is simple but effective, as long as the students respond to the guidance given. Some teachers sensibly allow time for students to review their own work and that of their classmates, so they understand how their own learning can be advanced.

In general, teaching assistants are sensibly deployed and they support individual students well. It is no coincidence, however, that they are most effective when teaching is strong. Where teaching is weak, teaching assistants spend too much time managing behaviour and their support lacks a learning focus.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Observations of teaching confirm that most students behave well, want to succeed and have positive attitudes to learning. However, although the vast majority of students follow instructions, too many are compliant rather than hard-working. This reflects, in part, a culture where some students do not consider it 'cool' to be seen to try hard or do well. High achievement is nicely celebrated by displays of work in some parts of the academy, such as the art department and in a few public spaces,

but too many classrooms have no displays of students' work, or any recognition or celebration of individual achievement.

Senior leaders have continued to raise expectations of students' conduct, and have taken a strong stance in respect of unacceptable behaviour. One consequence has been a marked increase in fixed-term exclusions in the autumn term, compared with the same period in 2013. Students regard this uncompromising approach as entirely reasonable and say that it is having a positive impact.

As noted previously, students of all ages say that they feel completely safe in school because bullying is rare and any incidents are immediately addressed. The high profile of staff, including senior leaders, around the academy contributes to the students' confidence. Nonetheless, too many lessons, including some observed during this inspection, are slow to get started and are disrupted by silly behaviour which students say is the norm. One student remarked that, despite being low-level, this disruption takes its toll on the learning and progress of others. In some lessons, teachers and teaching assistants waste too much time managing uncooperative behaviour or trying to encourage recalcitrant students to concentrate on their work. Subject leaders are aware of the problem but do not take enough responsibility for students' behaviour in and around their teaching areas, including the corridors and entrances. Staff who struggle to apply the behaviour policy consistently are not getting the support they need. Even in the sixth form centre, students do not take enough responsibility for their environment.

Procedures for checking attendance, such as first-day calling for absence, are suitably rigorous. These have also tightened arrangements for students' safety and encouraged much better home-school communication. Attendance in the autumn term was broadly similar to that in the previous year, but the attendance of disadvantaged students is lower than for the same period last year. This, and the fact that they are disproportionately excluded, remains a serious concern.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders have continued to work tirelessly to overhaul the academy's leadership structure and management systems. At the same time they have endeavoured to raise standards by driving improvements in teaching, behaviour and students' well-being, and also manage the transition to a new academy trust. Given the magnitude and urgency of these tasks, and the relative inexperience of the senior team, the academy's progress is impressive. The Acting Principal has steered the academy well, and has won the trust and confidence of the school community. Staff say that they feel valued and that morale is positive.

The leadership team, including governors, has ensured that the day-to-day running of the academy is efficient and effective. However, much remains to be done because so many aspects of the academy's work were underdeveloped or

dysfunctional, and the mismanagement of resources has left the academy's accommodation seriously neglected. Leaders have not yet created an environment across the academy that is conducive to learning: behaviour for learning is not yet good enough, and too many classrooms are uninviting places to learn. Moreover, the existing state of affairs is too readily accepted by some staff, and is not always challenged by senior and middle leaders. Procedures for monitoring the academy's work are developing well, with good lines of communication between staff, and with governors. However, the academy is only now in a position to start evaluating the impact of its work and to use this analysis to plan further improvement. The whole process of self-review and strategic planning is at an embryonic stage. Central policies and procedures, including performance management and financial management, have been introduced to ensure accountability and probity at all levels, including the allocation of funds and forward planning of expenditure. The recent strategic review of support roles demonstrates the determination to ensure that staff responsibilities are clear and have accountability linked to improving outcomes for students.

Senior leaders check on the quality of teaching and have introduced a cycle of more frequent short observations, as well as longer visits to lessons, in addition to formal lesson observations. Greater emphasis on sharing the most effective practice in the school, through an 'open door' approach has encouraged teachers to develop their own practice. The greater emphasis on improving marking has some effect, but the school realises that more work is needed to develop the impact of this work.

The work of the governing body is developing well. Governors are well informed and are able now to effectively hold senior leaders to account, to assume responsibility for strategic planning, and to ensure that the academy meets all its statutory obligations.

External support

The academy sensibly draws on a wide range of external support and guidance. It is making judicious use of consultants, including legal advice and employment guidance, to ensure that management systems are correctly instated and that decisions are properly founded. Good support is provided for leaders and governors by the Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust and from a National Leader of Governance.