

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 9161
Direct E: ann.morris@serco.com



Mr Richard Spence
Interim Principal
Darlinghurst School
Pavilion Drive
Leigh-on-Sea
SS9 3JS

6 February 2015

Dear Mr Spence

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Darlinghurst School

Following my visit to your academy on 5 February 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 me and the time you took to discuss behaviour and attendance in your academy.

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 and attendance at the academy.

Evidence

The inspector considered a wide range of evidence including:

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

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

Leaders and managers have not taken effective action to maintain the high standards of behaviour and attitudes identified at the academy's previous inspection.

The previous section 5 inspection was of the predecessor school, Darlinghurst Primary School in November 2009. At the time of the previous inspection, behaviour and attendance were judged separately. The behaviour at the school was good and attendance was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. This inspection evaluated attendance as part of behaviour, in accordance with the most recent inspection guidance in the School Inspection Handbook (Ofsted January 2015).

Context

You are the interim principal of the academy. You have been employed since September 2014 to support the academy as interim principal for 3 days a week due to the sudden death of the former principal. A permanent principal has been recruited to lead the academy to start in April 2015. There are two interim deputy principals working in the academy due to the long-term maternity leave of the deputy principal.

Darlinghurst is a larger than average primary school. The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding (additional funding provided for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority) is above average. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups and those who speak English as an additional language is above average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action, school action plus and those with a statement of special educational needs is below average. A larger than average proportion of pupils enters and leaves the academy during the academic year.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Since September 2014, attendance has improved but it remains below average and is in the lowest 20% of all schools nationally. The gap between the academy's attendance and the national average has not closed.

Academy staff track pupils' attendance very regularly. They identify those pupils whose attendance falls below 90%. However, the academy does not act swiftly enough to work with families to address low attendance. The academy recently identified approximately 50 pupils with low attendance but only eight of these families received the academy's letters of concern. Although the academy does not routinely authorise holidays during term time, a small minority of parents continue to take unauthorised holidays. The proportion of pupils with persistently high absence has reduced recently but remains too high. The academy does not use penalty notices to address persistent absence. Efforts to award good attendance are having some impact and they are popular with pupils. They particularly like the 'fast passes' they can win, for 100% attendance. These allow pupils to the front of the lunch queue.

A small proportion of pupils arrive late for the beginning of the day and this is not being monitored or addressed well enough. The home school worker has had some success with individual families. However, punctuality is not improving quickly enough. The academy's procedure for recording pupils as late is not clear enough. This means that teachers have an inconsistent approach to recording pupils who arrive after the start of the day.

The academy's behaviour and anti-bullying policies have been reviewed recently. Pupils understand the behaviour policy. They appreciate the rewards they receive for good behaviour and are aware of the sanctions for poor behaviour. Pupils say that behaviour is usually good but that some lessons are disrupted while teachers deal with inappropriate behaviour. Teachers regularly remind pupils about good listening and pupils generally respond appropriately to these reminders. Most pupils behave well in lessons, and have positive attitudes to their work. In some lessons, attitudes

to learning are not consistently positive. In these lessons, a small minority of pupils need regular reminders to stay focused when they do not listen well enough, fidget and lose focus.

A small minority of pupils have support plans to encourage good behaviour. The academy works productively with parents and other agencies to support pupils who find it difficult to behave well and focus appropriately in lessons. The learning mentor and home school worker contribute well to this work. They know the pupils and work sensitively with them and their families.

There is some inconsistency in the use of warnings, called yellow cards, in lessons. Some teachers use warnings with pupils more frequently than others do for similar misdemeanours. Yellow cards are issued when pupils do not pay attention or where low-level disruptive behaviour occurs. Teachers issue red cards to pupils if their low-level disruption continues or for more serious one-off incidents. When this happens, senior leaders become involved in seeking solutions. The academy does not analyse the use of yellow and red cards to check if behaviour is improving over time.

You have introduced a new system to record incidents of poor behaviour. Teachers and support staff, including mid-day assistants, record these. However, these records are not analysed to check for trends or patterns. Consequently, you and other leaders are not able to check that procedures are effective in improving behaviour. There are missed opportunities therefore to share good practice and support some teachers to manage behaviour effectively.

Records show that on rare occasions there has been some fighting and name calling on the playground. This has improved recently. Mid-day assistants receive regular training and support to deal with incidents appropriately. The playground has a range of activities to engage pupils purposefully. Play leaders set up activities and pupils enjoy taking part in their games. Older pupils hold workshops for younger pupils who choose to join in. The Anchor Room is a calm space inside the building, where pupils can play or read books with each other, a learning mentor and the special educational needs co-ordinator, during lunch times. Some pupils choose to spend time there and others are directed to do so. All of the pupils are happy to be there and often bring a friend.

Behaviour in assemblies is very good. Pupils listen respectfully to their teachers and to each other. Pupils move sensibly around the building. They show care for each other and respect for adults, including visitors. The dining room is calm and a well ordered place to be. Pupils enjoy talking to each other during their mealtime in a sociable atmosphere.

The academy's policy makes clear that bullying is taken very seriously. There are robust procedures to deal with bullying. These have been effective. Bullying is rare and has reduced over time. The academy teaches pupils how to stay safe when using mobile phones and the internet. They understand what they can do if they are worried.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the rates of attendance for all groups of pupils so that they are at least in line with the national average.
- Use attendance data to intervene swiftly to address concerns.
- Monitor punctuality more rigorously and take swift action to address lateness.
- Ensure that all staff apply the behaviour policy consistently in order to provide clarity to all pupils about what is expected of them.

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

Yours sincerely

Michelle Winter

Her Majesty's Inspector