

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

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Rachel Steele
Weston Favell Academy
Booth Lane South
Northampton
NN3 3EZ

Dear Mrs Steele

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Weston Favell Academy

Following my visit to your school on 18 March 2015, 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 school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

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

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

- ensure that the academy development plan prioritises the actions that will make the most difference in raising achievement
- strengthen systems to monitor how well teachers are meeting the needs of disabled students and those who have special educational needs
- eliminate the remaining inconsistencies in the quality of marking and assessment so that written feedback has a clear impact in raising attainment across the curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and the Executive Principal, other senior leaders and students to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met with the Chief Executive of Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust. I evaluated the academy development plan and made short visits to 13 lessons and eight tutor

sessions. I met with groups of teachers, including middle leaders and scrutinised the school's latest data on students' attendance, behaviour and achievement.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, the head of science and the head of mathematics have left the academy. These posts have been advertised externally and are currently held by acting heads of department.

Main findings

Academy leaders have incorporated the findings of the section 5 inspection into the academy development plan to ensure that the areas for improvement are addressed. The plan sets out appropriate success criteria and indicates when the effectiveness of the actions taken will be assessed. While the plan reflects the wide range of strategies being implemented to bring about improvement, it does not prioritise well enough the actions that will make the most difference in raising students' attainment. Nevertheless, you and other leaders are bringing about clear improvements to teaching and students' behaviour and attendance.

There has been a marked improvement in students' behaviour. The new behaviour policy - launched in consultation with staff, students and parents - has already had a significant impact in reducing low-level disruption in lessons. Students say that the new policy is making a big difference in improving behaviour, although some older students reported that a few teachers do not always follow the agreed procedures. This causes resentment. Academy leaders know this and are taking action to eliminate the remaining inconsistencies. During the inspection, almost all students behaved very well, though they said that behaviour is not always so good.

Continued actions to improve students' attendance are having a positive impact in reducing absence overall and in reducing the proportion of students who miss school regularly. While attendance is improving in all years, it continues to be too low in Key Stage 4, particularly for girls. The attendance of disadvantaged students and those who have special educational needs is also lower than for other students.

Actions taken to improve the quality of teaching are resulting in more teaching being consistently of good quality than before. Leaders know, however, that all teaching needs to be at least good to rapidly address past underachievement. Staff have received additional training in marking and feedback and middle leaders are playing an important role in ensuring staff implement the improvements expected. In discussions, Key Stage 4 students said they find the precise and tailored written feedback particularly helpful because it highlights the areas they need to improve on most in the run-up to their GCSE examinations. Younger students also spoke positively about improvements in the frequency and quality of teachers' written feedback and were particularly pleased about how marking has improved in science.

My scrutiny of students' books during visits to lessons revealed that teachers' comments are still not always helpful enough. In some of the lower sets, the advice given is sometimes too vague to be useful or easily implemented. In contrast, in art, very precise assessment criteria which is shared with the students equips them with the technical vocabulary to identify precisely how they can improve their subject-specific skills. Not all teachers make sure that students take meaningful action in response to their written comments. Staff have received training and resources to strengthen their practice in meeting the needs of disabled students and those with special educational needs. However, systems to monitor the impact in lessons of this training are not robust enough.

Students achievement is rising as a result of the changes you and your staff are making. Current data, informed by regular testing and externally moderated assessments, indicate that the proportion of students on track to secure five good grades at GCSE is 11% higher than at this time last year. Gaps in achievement between disadvantaged students and their classmates are reducing, although the gap continues to be too high in English for current Year 11 students.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Leaders and managers receive good challenge and support from the academy's trust through the weekly visits by the Executive Principal. The Trust is also providing external expertise to support the special educational needs coordinator as well as professional development for the heads of mathematics and English. The Trust plays a key role in supporting students' achievement by ensuring that assessments of attainment are moderated externally.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Academy Council, the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire local authority.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector