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Mr Dylan Davies
Headteacher
Brighton Aldridge Community Academy
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Dear Mr Davies

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Brighton Aldridge Community Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 25 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 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 December 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the academy was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- sharpen the academy action plan so that it is clear who is monitoring the impact of actions taken and precisely when they will check this
- ensure that all developments in teaching and learning are explicitly linked to all students making more rapid progress

Evidence

During the inspection I held meetings with you and other senior leaders, representatives of the governing body, the regional director for the Aldridge Foundation and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The academy action plan was evaluated. With you, I visited

several classrooms, talked to students and looked at their work. I briefly scrutinised a small selection of mathematics books. In addition, I reviewed the academy's single central record of staff vetting checks and the updated safeguarding policy.

Context

Since the last inspection, one teacher has left the academy and another has joined.

Main findings

You have responded with swift determination to address the areas identified for improvement in the last inspection. Governors note a more assertive and relentless drive for improvement from you and the senior team, which reflect a sharper and more focused approach.

Much of your work has dealt with making sure that teaching gets consistently better. You analysed inconsistencies in teaching with academy staff very thoroughly and this has provided a base on which to build an effective training programme. Weekly training for all teachers is now in place supported by specific training in key areas for individuals. For example, you have recently implemented a new lesson planning system which is used by all teachers. In some areas this is starting to show an impact. For instance in geography, because of better teaching, students are now making more rapid progress than previously, particularly in Year 10. Gaps in progress made by disadvantaged students and those with special educational needs and their peers are closing quickly in several year groups and subjects. In mathematics, disadvantaged students are now making progress in line with their peers in Year 9, which was not previously the case. However, you are aware that this is a work in progress and that inconsistencies remain.

You have started to place more emphasis on improving the rate of progress for all students. Nevertheless, this is not yet an overt enough message to all staff. Some middle leaders, and indeed governors, do not yet prioritise this with the urgency they should. You have made appropriate changes to the way in which teaching is judged, but there is not yet a strong enough focus on how it impacts on student progress.

You have tightened up the way in which senior and subject leaders check teachers' management of student behaviour. Systems are now being used more effectively and consistently. As a result, there has been an initial increase in reported behaviour incidents as you ensure that issues are tackled more thoroughly. During my visit, students were engaged and focused in lessons and were happy to share their work. There is already evidence of better challenge being offered to students in lessons, although you recognise that this is at an early stage.

The academy action plan clearly addresses all areas identified for improvement in the last inspection. The planned actions are appropriate and relevant. However, it does not yet identify who will monitor the impact of the actions taken, and when they will do this. This makes it more difficult for governors and others to check what is helping ensure the academy becomes good. Moreover, there are few overt references to raising levels of progress for students.

You rapidly organised external support to address any issues of homophobia in the academy. An external agency has delivered effective assemblies to younger students, and well-received training to staff. This has raised awareness and ensured that this issue is firmly on everybody's radar. You have quickly ensured that product design is now a part of the Year 7 and 8 design and technology curriculum.

The scrutiny of the governing body has sharpened considerably since the inspection. They fully recognise the improvements that need to be made and do not shy away from asking challenging questions of senior leaders. Through the Aldridge Foundation, governors have brokered the support of a director of leadership to work with the leadership team.

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

External support

The Aldridge Foundation continues to provide helpful support to the academy. Regular visits by the regional director ensure that senior leaders are held to account in all key areas, including attendance, behaviour and students' progress. Support is being provided for the mathematics department and this is already leading to improvements in teaching and learning. The academy now has a good relationship with the local authority. The improvement advisor provides helpful feedback on data about students' progress during regular meetings. The academy makes good use of local networks such as partnership school meetings.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Brighton and Hove.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Anwar
Her Majesty's Inspector