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Mr M Bayliss
Holyhead School
Milestone Lane
Holyhead Road
Handsworth
Birmingham
B21 0HN

28 April 2015

Dear Mr Bayliss,

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Holyhead School

Following my visit to your academy on 27 April 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 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 the high rates of exclusion at the academy.

Evidence

Inspectors considered evidence including:

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

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

Leaders and managers have taken effective action to maintain the high standards of behaviour and attitudes identified at the academy's previous inspection.

Context

Holyhead School is a larger than average 11-19 converter academy with a sixth form. It currently has 1016 students on roll in Years 7 to 11. A further 243 students

attend the sixth form. The proportion of students who are supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) is higher than is seen nationally. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is above average. The large majority of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest of which are Indian, Pakistani, Caribbean and Bangladeshi heritages. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is much higher than average.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' arrival to the academy site at the beginning of the day is calm, orderly and well supervised by staff, including senior leaders. Students are greeted by staff, creating a warm and positive start to the day. Standards of uniform are checked on arrival and these are reinforced by routine checks during lessons and on corridors throughout the day. This ensures that students are smartly dressed at all times. The small number of students who are late are challenged by duty staff and appropriate sanctions are imposed. As a result of these robust procedures, the academy has successfully reduced the numbers of students who are late to school and there are very few students who are repeatedly late.

High rates of staff supervision, described by the Principal as a 'relaxed vigilance', ensure that students are safe and support positive behaviour at informal times of the day. Although some circulation spaces and the dining area are not designed to accommodate the number of students currently at the academy, these areas are efficiently managed by staff and students act sensibly when moving around the site. I saw a small group of students engage in boisterous and unsafe behaviour on a stairwell. This was quickly identified, challenged and successfully tackled by staff. Students respect their environment and the site is largely free from litter and graffiti. During break times and lunchtimes, classrooms, outdoor socialisation spaces and sporting activities are provided so that students can enjoy a range of pursuits to meet their interests.

Students spoke willingly to me. They were courteous, friendly and proud of to be part of the academy. Students were generally positive about behaviour both in lessons, and at break time and lunch time. If they had concerns, they were clear about how to report these, for example, by going to the 'Student Support and Welfare Centre' or to duty staff, and were confident that they would be listened to and these issues resolved. They said that they were set high standards and had clear rules to follow, but that in a small number of lessons there was some variation in these standards. Older students in particular believed that behaviour had improved considerably during their time at the academy. Students speak highly of the rewards system and how this helped to motivate them to aim high and achieve more.

Students stated that bullying was rare, and not tolerated at the academy. They were very aware of the impact of different types of bullying, including prejudice-based and homophobic bullying. The academy's records that I saw show that any incidents of bullying are tackled effectively and there is a reduction in such incidents over time. One student I spoke to stated emphatically that Holyhead is an 'anti-bullying school'.

The academy's pastoral system, in which students are arranged in mixed-age tutor groups and 'colleges', is valued. Younger students feel very comfortable around older students and say that they help them and are good role models. This system has made a strong contribution to the atmosphere and ethos of the academy. A number of students commented what a happy place the academy was, viewing it as cohesive and harmonious community in which discrimination does not exist. They value the warmth that teachers show them and this permeates all aspects of academy life.

In lessons, students' learning is supported by positive relationships between teachers and students. Shared routines for starting and ending lessons set high standards for students. Students are attentive, follow instructions, and respond readily to teachers' questions. These behaviours support their progress in lessons. This was particularly the case in the Year 11 lessons I saw, in which students worked with determination, resilience and a desire to succeed. Occasionally the ending of lessons could be brisker so as to maximise students' time spent learning.

In a small number of lessons, particularly with younger students, and lower ability students, a minority of students are not fully involved in their learning, and in some cases, talk off-task during activities. Some teachers do not identify or challenge this low-level disruption quickly enough. At times, not enough thought is given to where students should sit and this encourages off-task chatter. Sometimes, during teacher-led questioning sessions, students call out, which limits the ability of teachers to use their questioning to fully check and extend the learning of individual students.

Leaders recognise the need to secure outstanding attitudes to learning for all students and have introduced a system of profiling and tracking the desired attributes to enable proactive intervention with students. This is a sensible move to ensure continued improvements in behaviour and achievement over time, and reflects leaders' high aspirations for students.

Systems to record behaviour using the academy's e-portal are rigorous. This enables leaders to track behaviour over time and identify patterns and trends, which can then be acted upon. The positive impact of leaders' actions to improve behaviour is evident in the demonstrable reduction in some types of behaviour, and in the overall reduction of negative incidents recorded. Effective additional support is put in place for those students whose behaviour or attendance is causing concern. Further work with primary schools is ensuring that any such issues are addressed earlier on.

Attendance continues to be above average and has, overall, improved this academic year. This reflects the high profile that good attendance is given in the academy, successful work with parents and other agencies, and students' positive attitudes to coming to school.

Leaders have used exclusions as a strategy to tackle negative or unsafe behaviour in the academy. The majority of permanent exclusions, which are above average, relate to one-off serious incidents. Rates of fixed-term exclusion are also well above that of other schools nationally. These figures are decreasing, but not rapidly enough. Leaders are aware of the need to make improvements, and are now

introducing new systems and procedures to accelerate the pace at which exclusions are reducing. However, the academy improvement plan does not tackle this issue directly enough and targets for reducing exclusions are not clearly stated. As a result, leaders are not sufficiently accountable for bringing about these changes.

I spoke formally to small group of students. These students spoke very highly of the support that the academy had given them, which had resulted in significant improvements in their behaviour. They particularly valued the guidance and care of the student support and welfare officers who had worked closely with them. They felt that the academy had worked effectively with their parents and that this too was important in helping them to bring about these improvements. As a result, these students are now more committed to succeed in their education. They also said that the academy had taught them to be tolerant and respectful of others.

Priorities for further improvement

- Accelerate the rate at which fixed term exclusions are reducing.
- Ensure that specific and measurable targets for reducing fixed term exclusions are included and given a high priority in the academy improvement plan.
- Embed recent strategies to secure outstanding attitudes for learning for all students, particularly younger students in the academy.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services, 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

Chris Chapman
Her Majesty's Inspector