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8 May 2015

Mr Kevin Walsh
Headteacher
Emerson Park Academy
Wych Elm Road
Hornchurch
RM11 3AD

Dear Mr Walsh

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Emerson Park Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 7 May 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. The inspection also focused on relevant aspects of the quality of leadership and management, including governance at the academy.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, other senior leaders, two groups of students in Key Stages 3 and 4, a few parents and carers, the two vice chairs of the Governing Body and the virtual headteacher of Havering local authority. I also scrutinised documents relating to the achievement of disadvantaged students. These included: governors' minutes; the school improvement and development plans; attendance records; literacy and numeracy intervention reports and development plans; the pupil premium action plan; faculty reports and information on achievement in Key Stage 4 in 2014. The academy's policies on the pupil premium funding and looked after children were also taken into consideration.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, staffing has remained stable and very few changes have taken place. The senior leadership team has, however, been restructured. Two new deputy headteachers were appointed in September 2014 and a lead literacy practitioner was appointed in January 2015. With 963 students on roll, the academy

is oversubscribed, with approximately three applicants for every place available. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is above average but an average proportion speak a first language other than English. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is low.

Main findings

The headteacher has the very able support of the senior leaders, including the governing body; all have a very good understanding of the community the academy serves. As a result, they ensure that there is a sharp focus on identifying and developing relevant strategies to support disadvantaged students and accelerate their progress. Three key features support the effectiveness of senior leaders. First, equality of access is a key feature of their work. Discussions with parents, carers and students confirm that the school is inclusive and their needs are met very well. Senior leaders have responded decisively to the recent decline in the 2014 GCSE results for disadvantaged students, whose GCSE results in English showed them to be at least one year behind their peers in the academy and nine months in mathematics. They have acted quickly to arrest any further decline in the performance of disadvantaged students. Specialist staff with a clear remit have been appointed to develop and oversee strategies. All are making a major contribution to the inclusive ethos and highlighting the needs of this group. Partnership with parents and carers is very good, and most parents and carers are now more involved in their children's learning.

Second, the continuous approach to monitoring the progress of disadvantaged students is supporting the academy's commitment to improving their performance. Very good links have been established with primary schools, and there is a smooth transition to the academy. On entry, Year 7 students are assessed and the information is used very well to meet their needs. Assessment is continuous and systems for tracking and identifying the needs of disadvantaged students are robust. As a result, staff can quickly analyse a range of information and make changes to provide better support.

Third, accountability is unremitting. Governors are very well informed; they challenge the academy's work and ensure that the performance of disadvantaged students, as with other groups, is consistently on the agenda. This challenge extends to the senior leadership team through to middle leaders and other staff. Line management ensures achievement is evaluated and the findings recorded clearly. This is underpinned by extensive review and planning for improvement.

External support

The academy has continued to work with the virtual headteacher from the local authority. The local authority mainly holds the academy to account through monitoring the quality of personal education plans for looked after students before funding is released. There is however, insufficient emphasis on evaluating the impact of the additional funded initiatives on improving students' performance. Effective

work with the local education welfare officers is leading to stringent actions being taken and improvement in the attendance of a few disadvantaged students whose attendance is below their peers in the academy. Links are also established with good local schools to challenge and moderate the accuracy of assessment information. These schools are Abbs Cross and St Clere's in Thurrock.

The strengths in the school's approaches to supporting its disadvantaged pupils effectively to achieve their potential are:

- Senior leaders are focused on maintaining a sharp enough focus on developing good practice that is based on action research. Findings are used very well to inform practice. Extensive research on barriers affecting the achievement of disadvantaged students mean that resources – time, people and events – are better deployed to dismantle identified barriers. For example, parents and carers are now more involved in their children's learning and the attendance of disadvantaged students has improved because measures are in place to provide transport.
- The additional funding is very well targeted on the needs of students. There are several positive features. For instance, students in Key Stage 3 are given additional time to improve their basic literacy and numeracy skills to meet the demands of the academic curriculum. Students benefit from individual tuition and revision classes. Together with their parents or carers, they place a high value on this provision, particularly as there is tangible improvement in their progress. For example, their reading skills are better and the 2015 predicted GCSE grades show improvement. Provision also extends to a few students having an opportunity to develop their musical skills. All students can take part in enrichment activities and receive specialist support such as counselling or mentoring. Good quality care pervades the academy's life and work. This now includes a bursary as an incentive to increase the number of students entering sixth form schools and sustaining their studies. It is however, too early to comment on the impact of this new initiative. Parents and carers are positive about the impact of the work to engage their children in learning.
- Personal education plans are of a good quality with a clear emphasis on students' views and information on their progress over time.
- The academy uses effective systems to track and monitor students' progress; these are accessible to parents, carers and students. The electronic system operates efficiently and is leading to parents and carers raising questions about their children's progress. Careful monitoring of the data identifies strengths in teaching and learning across faculties and is enabling senior leaders to link this information to performance management.

The weaknesses in the school's approaches to supporting its disadvantaged pupils effectively to achieve their potential are:

- The academy's strategic plans, the development plan and its evaluation of the quality of provision do not provide in-depth focus on the provision for disadvantaged students. While it is too early to evaluate some of the new initiatives, evaluation is not consistently comprehensive.
- Senior leaders have high expectations of students' achievement and have started to develop students' cultural and social literacy skills. However, not all disadvantaged students have high aspirations and the 'can do' culture is not universal; there is still more work to do to engage all of them in their education. Inspection evidence indicates that not all staff are consistent in emphasising high expectations of work and behaviour. This affects the progress of disadvantaged students.
- Students have an understanding of the premium funding; in particular, those in Key Stage 4 exercise their rights to extra support. However, inspection evidence indicates that learning can be affected when there is a delay in meeting requests.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that the vision of high aspirations is pervasive in all faculties so that all disadvantaged students can embrace it and become enthusiastic learners.
- Improve the action plan so that it is more sharply focused on the achievement of disadvantaged students by ensuring that proposed actions are linked to clear targets and key milestones for measuring progress.
- Ensure that changes can be sustained and all initiatives are consistently evaluated to identify strengths, weaknesses and next steps.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Havering, to the Secretary of State for Education and Board of Directors. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector