

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
Direct email Ann.Morris@serco.com

15 May 2015

Tony Downing
Headteacher
Caroline Chisholm School
Wooldale Road
Wootton Fields
Northampton
NN4 6TP

Dear Mr Downing

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Caroline Chisholm School

Following my visit to your school on 14 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).

Evidence

I met with you and other senior leaders, a teacher and a pastoral support worker whose roles are funded by the pupil premium, the pastoral leader for Year 11 students and representatives of the governing body, including the chair of governors. I also held discussions with groups of students from Key Stages 3, 4 and 5, including children in the care of the local authority. I met with three carers. I scrutinised a wide range of documents, including the school's vision statement and improvement plan, minutes from meetings of the governing body, the half-termly reports to governors provided by the school's senior leadership team, information regarding the destinations of students at the end of Year 11 and Year 13, attendance data and information regarding exclusions. I looked at a sample of students' personal education plans, statutory information on the school's website regarding the pupil premium, the recent review of pupil premium spending commissioned by the school and a wide range of data relating to students'

achievement. I made short visits to two lessons and looked at samples of students' work.

Context

Caroline Chisholm School converted to academy status in August 2011. This all-through school is larger than average and admits pupils from ages 4 to 19. At its last section 5 inspection, in September 2012, the quality of education provided by the academy was judged to be good. The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is well below average. There are currently six students in the care of the local authority. This monitoring inspection assessed the effectiveness of the school's work to support disadvantaged students in the secondary phase only. Although the school converted to become an academy, it is still referred to within the academy, in publications and locally, as a school.

Main findings

The achievement of disadvantaged students

Gaps between disadvantaged students, other students in the school and other students nationally are closing, though you and other school leaders know there is still work to do to raise the achievement of disadvantaged students further.

Published data for the 2014 GCSE results show significant gaps in attainment. For example, in English, the gap in attainment between disadvantaged students and other students in the school and nationally equated to almost a whole GCSE grade. In mathematics, the gap equated to over a whole grade against others in the school and almost a whole grade against other students nationally. Published data show that a much smaller proportion of disadvantaged students made the progress expected in English and mathematics than did other students in the school. However, this data reflects students' first attempt at their English and mathematics GCSEs, rather than their best attempt, with many students improving their grades at the second attempt. While there is no national data against which students' best entries can be compared, achievement by the end of Year 11, when students' best entries are considered, was significantly stronger, particularly in mathematics. While only 25% of disadvantaged students attained five good grades at GCSE in English and mathematics on their first entries, this figure rose to 43% on their best entry. Nevertheless, the gaps in attainment between disadvantaged students and others in the school remained too large in this school in which attainment overall is higher than average.

The school's current data, which is partly based on completed controlled assessments as well as regular testing, indicate very significant improvements in the achievement of disadvantaged students. For example, 77% of Year 11 mathematicians eligible for the pupil premium are currently on track to make the progress expected. This compares favourably with the national picture for non-

eligible students from last year. Almost all disadvantaged students are predicted to attain a grade A* to C in mathematics. The school's assessments in March 2015 showed that gaps in attainment in English remained too large for Year 11 students. Swift action was taken to remedy this, including through a two-day programme of support from specialist staff delivered at a local hotel and conference centre. As a result of this action, the school now forecasts that over 80% of the disadvantaged students will secure a grade C or above in GCSE English. Students I met with who took part in this initiative reported that this intervention has had a very strong impact on their attainment in English and also boosted their confidence and motivation as they prepare for their other examinations. Gaps in other subjects are closing quickly for current Year 11 students.

Gaps in achievement in other years vary but are generally minimal. In Year 9, disadvantaged students are currently doing better in English than their peers. In Year 7 and Year 8, the gaps are negligible in English and mathematics. School leaders know that gaps are widest in Year 10 and this is now a key focus for the school.

The leadership and management of provision for disadvantaged students

The school has a very strong, effective and comprehensive approach to supporting students who are eligible for the pupil premium. As a result of your calm, measured and strategic leadership, the actions taken to support disadvantaged students are well planned, meticulously delivered and thoroughly evaluated. The school's commitment to raising the achievement of disadvantaged students is reflected in your decision to commission an external review of this aspect of its work to check that strategies reflected best practice.

You are also an excellent role model with regard to pastoral care and inclusion. Some of the students I met with specifically mentioned how you had looked out for them when they were experiencing particular and significant personal difficulties. The school's work to raise the achievement of disadvantaged students benefits from a strong senior leadership team who work very effectively together to ensure teaching and the curriculum meets the needs of all groups of students well.

Leaders ensure the additional funding is spent responsibly and carefully. A large proportion of the funding has been spent to provide additional teaching for disadvantaged students who need extra support in mathematics. These students benefit from small-group teaching, delivered by specialist mathematics teachers. A good example of this was seen during the inspection where a mathematics teacher worked with four students to improve their skills in calculating and manipulating fractions. Careful planning means that students' achievement in other subjects is not diminished because much of this teaching takes place within mathematics curriculum time.

The school's systems to track students' achievement and the quality of teaching are strong. Leaders and managers make very good use of data to identify emerging

gaps so that changes to the curriculum or pastoral support can be made where students fall behind. Regular lesson observations and learning walks as well as scrutinies of students' work mean that senior staff have a strong understanding of how well students are doing. While lesson observations usually focus on the achievement of different groups of students, they do not always explicitly assess the impact of teaching on students eligible for the pupil premium.

Students I met with were all highly supportive of the school and the quality of education it provides. They value the invitations they receive to attend homework club, which is often staffed by specialist subject teachers. Students also value the regular contact their teachers make with home, including through letters to celebrate their academic successes or improvements in their conduct. The carers I met with also said they value this aspect of the school's work.

All students reported that marking in English is strong because it helps them identify how they can improve their work and sets additional tasks to consolidate or strengthen learning. Good examples of marking and feedback were also seen in humanities, with students taking action to make the necessary improvements by their teachers. Some Key Stage 3 students reported that marking in mathematics is less consistent than in other subjects. They also said that behaviour was sometimes not good enough in some of the middle and lower sets, with teachers not being strict enough in enforcing the school's behaviour management systems. They say that teachers in English are stricter and they like this because it means they can work well. Students I met with from Key Stage 4 spoke positively about the quality of marking and behaviour in their mathematics classes.

The school has also used pupil premium funding to employ a pastoral mentor for disadvantaged students. This role has strengthened the school's work to support and challenge students and their parents where students' attendance and punctuality fall below expectations. It also means that the school has a better understanding of any emotional or practical difficulties which may be inhibiting students' attendance. Good examples were seen of how staff have used this information to improve the attendance and punctuality of individual students. While the attendance of eligible students is lower than for other students in the school, it is improving and is now close to average.

The school's highly inclusive approach is reflected in the strong support provided for children in the care of the local authority. In discussions, these students – and their carers – were unanimous in their praise for the school and the support it has provided. One student told me during discussions that, 'coming here is literally the best move I've ever made in my life'. One carer, typifying the views of others, commented, 'I cannot fault the school for the support it provides.' Carers also said that the school provides good academic challenge for the children in their care.

Excellent support for disadvantaged and other students is also reflected in the school's strong systems to help students identify the next steps in their education or training. All students currently in Year 11 who are not staying onto the school's sixth

form have secured places on courses or apprenticeships elsewhere, including every student eligible for the pupil premium. Excellent information, advice and guidance means that virtually all Year 13 students who have been eligible for free school meals within the last six years have secured places at university or college for next year, including at some of the countries more prestigious universities.

Governors and senior leaders use performance management arrangements well to drive ambition for disadvantaged students. For example, the headteacher, senior staff and other teachers and staff have performance targets relating to narrowing gaps in achievement. However, the targets are not always precise enough to enable the teachers' success in meeting them to be easily measured. Similarly, while the achievement of students eligible for the pupil premium is discussed in subject meetings, it is not always given sufficient priority in department action-planning. Disadvantaged students, like other students in the school, are given challenging academic targets. During the inspection, I asked you to consider setting even higher targets for disadvantaged students to support the school's work to eliminate remaining gaps in attainment. You agreed to consider this as part of the school's planning for new assessment arrangements from September.

Governors monitor the achievement of disadvantaged students very effectively, not least because of the regular and good quality information they receive from school leaders. The senior member of staff responsible for the leadership and oversight of the achievement of disadvantaged students meets regularly with the governor who has oversight of this area of the school's work, to discuss the impact of strategies intended to raise attainment. Governors' minutes show that gaps in achievement are monitored effectively by the governing body. Less clear from the minutes, is the rigour with which governors challenge the school over the attendance and exclusions data regarding disadvantaged students. While this is a very inclusive school which never permanently excludes students, disadvantaged students are slightly over-represented in the school's fixed term exclusions data.

External support

The school works well with a number of external organisations to support the learning and well-being of disadvantaged students. Partnership working with the local Connexions service is particularly strong and helps explain why all students who left the school at the end of Year 11 last year secured places in education or training. The school welcomes critical evaluation of its work, for example through the external review of pupil spending it recently commissioned.

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

- The strong commitment of senior staff and governors to ensuring disadvantaged students achieve well.

- Careful planning and spending, informed by academic research and external expertise, which ensures that initiatives have the maximum impact in raising the attainment of disadvantaged students.
- Good systems of evaluation and review to ensure that strategies to support disadvantaged students are making enough difference to their achievement, including by governors.
- Very strong pastoral care which supports the most vulnerable students very effectively.
- Excellent information, advice and guidance which ensures that all students who leave the school secure places in education or training elsewhere.
- Strong work with external agencies to support students facing particular and significant personal difficulties.
- Strong partnership working with parents and carers.
- Very careful tracking of students' achievement which enables the school to keep a close eye on how well disadvantaged students are doing in all year groups and subjects.

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

- Teachers' and pastoral leaders' performance management targets relating to disadvantaged students are not always sufficiently precise.
- Not all department action plans give enough focus to raising the achievement of disadvantaged students.
- The best marking, for example in English, is not seen in all subjects.
- Lesson observations do not always report explicitly on the progress made by disadvantaged students.
- Governors do not monitor the attendance and exclusions data regarding disadvantaged students as well as they monitor their achievement.
- Behaviour in Key Stage 3 mathematics lessons is not always good.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that teachers' and pastoral leaders' performance management targets relating to disadvantaged students are always sufficiently precise.
- Check that all department action plans give due attention to the achievement of disadvantaged students.

- Make sure that the best marking is seen in all classes and subjects.
- Ensure that lesson observations and other monitoring activities include explicit focus on the achievement of disadvantaged students.
- Ensure governors check attendance and exclusions data regarding disadvantaged students as thoroughly as they check their achievement.
- Review target setting procedures to ensure they support the school's work to eliminate the gaps in attainment between disadvantaged students and other students in the school and nationally.
- Ensure behaviour in mathematics is consistently good.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire, to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and as below. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority – (including where a school is an academy)
- For academies: CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
hns.efa@education.gsi.gov.uk