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13 May 2015

Dr Stephen Bizley
Headteacher
Gosford Hill School
Oxford Road
Kidlington
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Dear Dr Bizley

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Gosford Hill School

Following my visit to your academy on 13 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 students. The inspection also focused on relevant aspects of the quality of leadership and management (including governance) at the academy.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and senior leaders, including the leader responsible for students with special educational needs and disabilities and the academy's pupil premium champion. I held discussions with groups of disadvantaged students eligible for the pupil premium funding from a range of year groups. In addition, I met with representatives of the governing body. I scrutinised documents relating to the achievement of disadvantaged students and looked at the academy's records and tracking of attendance and exclusions for this group of students. I reviewed the academy's self-evaluation document and the raising achievement plan.

Context

This was the academy's first inspection since becoming an academy in 2012. Gosford Hill is of an average size, with a smaller-than-average sixth form.

The proportion of disadvantaged students eligible for the government's pupil premium funding is smaller than is nationally the case. The proportion of students from minority ethnic heritages is smaller than average, as is the proportion of students with special educational needs or disabilities. The academy is part of the Oxfordshire Teaching Schools' Alliance (OTSA). Teachers from Gosford Hill facilitate an outstanding teachers' programme for other colleagues in OTSA. Since the last inspection, student numbers have dropped and now fluctuate from year to year. Difficulties in recruitment have led to the deployment of a number of temporary staff in the science department.

Summary

Disadvantaged students do not achieve well enough at Gosford Hill. Over the last three years, published data show that the gaps between the achievement of this group of students and their peers in school and nationally have grown in English, mathematics and overall. In particular, the proportion of disadvantaged students making expected progress in English and mathematics is lower than seen nationally. The small numbers of more able disadvantaged students do not typically achieve the highest grades. Moreover, the attendance of disadvantaged students is significantly lower than that of other students, and exclusions for this group are higher.

The achievement of current Year 11 disadvantaged students is improving in English and they are catching up quickly with their peers. Students are on track to make better progress than last year. This is because teachers have implemented strategies from training they have received to support disadvantaged students. In mathematics, the gap is closing much more slowly; disadvantaged students currently in Year 11 are still well behind their peers and have not made enough progress.

The very small numbers of disadvantaged students in the sixth form make good progress, in line with their peers. This is because of teachers' focused individual work with students.

The academy does not yet track the progress of disadvantaged students well enough in Years 7 to 9. Leaders do not know whether the rates of progress for these students are improving or not, overall. There is, however, a range of support in place such as the academy's reading improvement programme. This has been effective; data show that a group of Year 7 disadvantaged students made gains in their reading of 12 months over a 12 week programme. Intervention and support for disadvantaged students with special educational needs is evaluated well, and shows an accelerated rate of progress.

The attendance of disadvantaged students is improving overall because of the academy's more effective work with parents. However, there is wide variation in the level of attendance of disadvantaged students in different year groups. The academy does not compare information on attendance for disadvantaged students with that of their non-disadvantaged peers sharply enough and so cannot track whether gaps in attendance are closing sufficiently quickly.

Training has been provided by senior leaders for teachers in how to use information about students' progress to plan lessons and support disadvantaged students more effectively. This is starting to take effect, for example in English in Year 11, where achievement gaps are closing between disadvantaged students and their peers. Pastoral support for disadvantaged students is good. Students feel safe and happy in academy, and report that teachers encourage them to aim high. The way in which the academy welcomes new disadvantaged students and helps them to settle in quickly is a strength.

Leadership and management

Leadership of the achievement of disadvantaged students has been weak over time.

Although academy leaders identified the achievement of disadvantaged students as a shortcoming in the academy some years ago, leaders' actions have been much too slow. Leaders do not track or collate data on the achievement, attendance and behaviour of disadvantaged students systematically enough, particularly in the lower year groups. Teachers' assessment of students' work is not always accurate. Leaders have not insisted that assessment is cross-checked within the academy or with external providers to ensure that it is secure.

Nevertheless, since September 2014, you have sharpened the academy's focus on disadvantaged students. A new data tracking system now enables all teachers to quickly identify these students in their classes. Additional support is provided as required. Furthermore, you have ensured that the progress of disadvantaged students is included in all teachers' performance management targets this year. A senior leader has been given the overall responsibility for improving the outcomes for disadvantaged students. She has been successful in increasing the urgency with which the academy is now tackling this issue.

Leaders are more aware of the need to measure information about disadvantaged students' achievement against that of their more affluent peers in the academy and nationally so that leaders' judgments about their progress are more accurate. Leaders now understand that accelerated progress is required in order for disadvantaged students to catch up with other students. However, the way in which teachers are held to account by middle leaders for the achievement of disadvantaged students in their classes is not consistently robust at all levels.

The academy has worked hard to involve the parents of disadvantaged students in their education. A more personalised approach has seen higher levels of attendance at parents' evenings, although leaders recognise that there is more to do.

Leaders do not routinely provide governors with the relevant data they need about disadvantaged students' progress. As a result, governors do not know how well disadvantaged students are achieving across the academy, or whether their progress is accelerating as it needs to. Without this information, they cannot challenge

academy leaders effectively. The way in which the school has spent the government's pupil premium funding has not secured improvements in achievement for this group of students because it has not been sharply enough focused on their needs. Governors have not monitored this robustly enough.

External support

The academy is a member of OTSA. Gosford Hill teachers facilitate an 'outstanding teachers' programme. No evidence was seen of any support provided to Gosford Hill regarding the achievement of disadvantaged students.

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

- Senior leaders now have a clear understanding of the urgent need to improve outcomes for disadvantaged students and have communicated this to staff. Training for staff has raised awareness of this key area and has provided strategies for teachers to use in their classrooms.
- Gaps in achievement are closing in Year 11 in English. Disadvantaged students in the sixth form achieve well.
- Reading skills are improving for identified disadvantaged students in Year 7 because of an effective support programme.
- Disadvantaged students feel well supported and cared for in school; new students are welcomed and quickly settle in.

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

- Disadvantaged students do not make sufficient progress and are not catching up with their peers quickly enough. This is because leaders have only recently begun to take action to address this issue, and have lacked a sense of urgency.
- Leaders' evaluation of standards in the school, and particularly those for disadvantaged students, is over-generous. This is partly because teachers' assessment of students' work is not always accurate.
- Leaders do not yet collate information about the performance of disadvantaged students systematically enough to enable them to check how well students are doing.
- Leaders do not hold teachers to account robustly enough for the achievement of disadvantaged students in their classes.

- Governors do not challenge senior leaders rigorously enough because they do not receive sufficient information from the school about the achievement of different groups of students. They do not know how well disadvantaged students are doing in Years 7–9. Governors do not monitor the spending of the pupil premium fund sharply enough in terms of the difference it makes to the achievement of disadvantaged students.

Priorities for further improvement

- Establish a system for collating all information about disadvantaged students so that leaders can accurately evaluate how well they are doing compared to their non-disadvantaged peers in school and nationally.
- Ensure that assessment of student performance is always accurate, and that data on student achievement, particularly for disadvantaged students, are provided for governors regularly.
- An external review of governance and of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

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

Catherine Anwar
Her Majesty's Inspector