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Mr Andy Christoforou  
Headteacher  
Abbey College  
Abbey Road  
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Dear Mr Christoforou

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Abbey College**

Following my visit to your academy on 13 November 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.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, I held meetings with you and your senior leadership team, and also met with five subject leaders, three governor representatives and groups of pupils from Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. I scrutinised documentation relating to the achievement, attendance and destinations of disadvantaged pupils. I looked at examples of pupils' work, governors' minutes and the academy's policy, planning and review documents. I observed learning taking place within 'The Bridge', the academy's provision for pupils who need additional help to improve their literacy and numeracy.

### **Context**

The academy was last inspected in November 2013, when its overall effectiveness was judged to require improvement. Leadership and management were judged to be good, as were behaviour and safety. Since the inspection, and your subsequent appointment, there have been several changes in the leadership team. These include the recent appointment of an assistant headteacher with overall responsibility for raising the aspirations of all pupils, including the disadvantaged. The academy's pupil profile remains largely unaltered; the proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged

and who are supported by additional pupil premium funding is below the national average.

### **The impact of leadership and management in raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils**

The last inspection reported that 'gaps are closing quickly for many pupils' and that the academy was making good use of pupil premium funding to ensure that eligible pupils received the necessary support. It noted that the GCSE 'grade gap' in English and mathematics between disadvantaged pupils and others narrowed significantly between 2012 and 2013. This improvement has not been sustained and gaps in attainment at GCSE have widened. In 2015, this was largely due to the limited progress made by a small group of pupils educated in alternative provision off-site on a full time basis over a three year period. You reviewed this provision shortly after your appointment as headteacher and have sharply reduced the number of pupils who are being educated off-site. The academy's monitoring information indicates that current disadvantaged pupils are making better progress in a number of subjects, including English and mathematics, and catching up with others of similar prior ability. However, leaders acknowledge that too few are on course to gain at least five A\* to C grades at GCSE; current information does not indicate that the gap between disadvantaged pupils' attainment and others is on track to narrow appreciably. In large part, this reflects the fact that the additional support or challenge offered to disadvantaged pupils has had limited impact in closing gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding, particularly in the sciences and in modern foreign languages.

Senior leaders are adopting a determined approach to making the necessary changes. Liaison with primary schools is increasingly well-developed; this helps leaders to determine individuals' precise strengths and weaknesses in literacy and numeracy before they join the school. Most teachers use this information well to plan activities that will meet each pupil's particular needs. Those with low levels of literacy and numeracy receive well-targeted and effective extra help in 'The Bridge'. Leaders, including subject leaders, are monitoring the progress of disadvantaged pupils very carefully and quickly identify any who are in danger of falling behind. Early, and well-targeted, intervention is now a priority. In most subjects this is based upon detailed assessment information that enables teachers to pinpoint precisely the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Evidence from assessment data indicates that progress gaps are narrowing in English, mathematics, history and geography as a result.

The academy recognises that the absence rates for disadvantaged pupils have been too high in the past, but sharply focused work has improved this picture. Leaders' work to help parents understand the impact of poor attendance upon progress has been particularly effective in reducing pupils' absence. A recently appointed member of staff acts as a 'champion' for disadvantaged pupils, and is helping parents to understand the best ways in which they can support their children's learning. This is reflected in high levels of attendance at parent meetings and other events. Senior

leaders consider all of the information they have about disadvantaged pupils' attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning to identify those who are at risk of making limited progress across a number of subjects. This is starting to ensure that rapid intervention takes place before individuals fall far behind.

Current disadvantaged pupils are closing the gap with others in a number of subjects, including English, mathematics, history and geography because leaders have high aspirations and are committed to improving the quality of teaching and learning. Pupils spoke positively about the precision of the feedback they usually receive on their work, and the time teachers give them to make the necessary changes. They recognise that their target grades are ambitious, but most feel they know what they need to do to achieve them and that they will be supported to do so. Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils have the same access to the best teaching as others, and make changes to teaching groups when necessary to minimise the impact of teacher absence upon pupils' progress. Teachers are held accountable for the progress made by disadvantaged pupils in their classes. Some teachers do not ensure that activities these pupils complete help them to close gaps in their knowledge and understanding or to move forward quickly in their learning when they are ready to. Leaders are holding teachers to account for pupils' progress and take robust action when necessary.

Many disadvantaged pupils have high aspirations concerning their future careers; they are encouraged to aim high. Effective careers guidance helps pupils to understand the formal qualifications and personal qualities that they will need to fulfil their ambitions. Pastoral leaders work effectively to remove any barriers that might prevent pupils from doing so. Disadvantaged pupils are encouraged to take up positions of leadership within the academy, and to engage in enrichment activities; the academy's monitoring information indicates many do so. A high, and growing, proportion are learning to play a musical instrument, for example. In these ways, leaders are promoting these pupils' personal development well. During the visit, many pupils spoke about the importance of resilience, their willingness to make changes to their work and their determination to 'get it right'.

Governors share the high expectations and determination of senior leaders that all pupils will achieve highly, whatever their starting points or circumstances. They have worked with senior leaders to create a comprehensive plan to improve provision for disadvantaged pupils. Governors are monitoring progress towards its objectives carefully, basing their evaluations upon clear evidence. Governors monitor the attendance of disadvantaged pupils particularly closely and have supported leaders' efforts to reduce absence effectively. They are well informed about the progress and achievement of disadvantaged pupils at GCSE, and use assessment information, and evidence from their regular visits, to monitor the academy's work and ask challenging questions. Governors' understanding of disadvantaged pupils' progress in subjects other than English and mathematics at Key Stage 3 is less secure.

## **External support**

Leaders recently commissioned an external audit of the academy's provision for disadvantaged pupils. The conclusions have helped to inform the academy's improvement plans, although it is too soon to determine the impact of some of the changes that have been made.

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

- Leaders, including governors, share a determination to provide the highest quality of teaching, care and support in order to secure the best outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The academy monitors the quality of provision for disadvantaged pupils carefully. The achievement of disadvantaged pupils is central to the academy's self-evaluation and planning. Senior leaders recognise that there are gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding and are holding subject leaders and teachers accountable for the progress made by these pupils.
- Leaders work well with primary schools to identify the needs of disadvantaged pupils and any gaps in their literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers use this information to plan activities that help to close these gaps quickly once pupils join the academy.
- Most teachers use the information they have about pupils' progress to plan well-targeted additional support or challenge for individuals, and ensure that its impact is tracked carefully. This is helping to accelerate disadvantaged pupils' rates of progress within English, mathematics, history and geography.
- Leaders encourage disadvantaged pupils to aim high; careers information, education and guidance is a strength. Pupils understand the qualifications and personal qualities they will need to succeed in their chosen careers, courses or apprenticeships and work towards these well.
- The attendance rates of disadvantaged pupils are rising sharply because of the very swift and effective responses to any cases of repeated absence. Leaders use all of the information they have about individuals' attendance, behaviour, engagement and progress to identify and assist quickly those who are a cause for concern.
- Leaders promote the personal development of disadvantaged pupils well by working effectively with parents, so that pupils take opportunities to get involved in cultural, sporting, social and leadership activities. Tracking indicates that these pupils are at least as likely to participate as others.

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

- Not all teachers plan activities that will meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils and help them to move forward in their learning. This is a particular issue within modern foreign languages and the sciences, because some teachers do not identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding precisely and quickly enough.
- Prior to recent changes, intervention to support disadvantaged pupils who were falling behind often did not take place during Key Stage 3. This meant that pupils started GCSE with gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Some of these gaps remain and limit pupils' progress.
- Governors' understanding of the extent of progress being made at Key Stage 3 by disadvantaged pupils in subjects other than mathematics and English is limited.

**Priorities for further improvement**

- Ensure that all teachers plan activities that provide appropriate support and challenge to disadvantaged pupils, and use their monitoring information to target help for individuals precisely and swiftly, so that gaps in their knowledge and understanding are closed.
- Ensure that governors gain a clear understanding of the extent of progress being made by disadvantaged pupils across all subjects and year groups, and provide support and challenge to leaders so that standards continue to rise.

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

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**