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Mr Sean Cannon
Principal
Action for Children, Parklands Campus
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Dear Mr Cannon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Action for Children, Parklands Campus

Following my visit to your school on 9 December 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school. Senior leaders and governors should take further action to:

- ensure that the new electronic system for tracking students' academic progress along with their social development is fully implemented as soon as possible.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the Principal and vice-principal, the assistant principal responsible for teaching and learning, the Chair of Governors and a representative from Action for Children. Short visits were undertaken to a number of lessons on two separate occasions, safeguarding documents were scrutinised, including those relating to checks made on staff, a phone call was made to the local authority's designated officer (LADO), students' work was scrutinised and a meeting was held with two students.

Context

Since my last inspection the new Principal has taken up his post. One of the vice-principals has left and a new physical education teacher has joined the school.

Main findings

The new Principal has made significant and carefully planned changes that are having a positive impact on students' progress. He has worked determinedly with staff and students to ensure that everyone fully understands his raised expectations. Leaders and governors now carefully check the impact of their actions to ensure that they lead to better progress than previously for students. Teaching has improved because teachers plan tasks that enable students to gain a deeper understanding of the subject, as well as important social skills. Learning opportunities are planned to make effective use of the school's extensive grounds, including participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. The leader who is now responsible for safeguarding has diligently implemented the recommendations from the recent review undertaken by the LADO.

Teachers plan lessons that require students to use a range of different skills. It is noticeable that in a number of practical and academic lessons, students learn from, and help, each other. For example, in a mathematics lesson, students were using mathematical reasoning to work out how to divide numbers into equal parts. Their learning was enhanced because the teacher provided them with a well-chosen resource. This enabled the students to split 3-D rectangles into smaller equally-sized rectangles. Students enthusiastically discussed how best to use the resource, and asked the teacher about what their approach should be. She insisted that they figure this out independently but gave them some useful clues. This indicated how much they wanted to succeed at the task. Online mathematics programmes are used now to reinforce learning and add challenge rather than as the key means by which students learn. This has given more opportunities for students to air their misconceptions. The teacher effectively tackles these by making good use of resources that make abstract concepts concrete.

Leaders have improved the way teachers track students' progress from their starting points. Further plans are in place to develop this so that the tracking includes how well students develop as learners, including acquiring communication and social skills. Teachers now effectively feed back to students about the progress they are making. This feedback is better structured than previously because it links back to the aim of the lesson, which the teacher clearly shares with students at the start. Teachers use the information they get from feedback to students about their progress to set challenging targets. These are helpfully placed at the front of students' folders. Students are very proud of their work in these folders and are able to identify how it meets the targets they are set. Students' learning needs are well catered for in most lessons. Occasionally, students who have stronger written skills,

but are not as effective at explaining their learning needs, sometimes require more challenge in the tasks teachers set them.

Governance is strong and effective. Governors have communicated clearly with leaders about the direction of travel the school needs to take and regularly check that improvement is rapid enough. These checks are now rigorous and include spending the day in the school, working alongside the teachers. As a result, the Chair of Governors and the representative from Action for Children know the students in the school very well. They take account of students' views, as well as their rates of progress, when evaluating the impact of changes. A number of governors have relevant expertise, which they use to good effect. For example, they support leaders to implement recommendations from the recent safeguarding review and check that this has been done well and in a timely manner. In particular, there are now much clearer guidelines about rewards and sanctions.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The Principal has benefited from an in-depth induction at the other Action for Children school in Wales. The school's leaders have wisely asked the LADO to review some of its safeguarding procedures, and following this, recommended changes have been made. The school has received effective support in implementing these changes from senior leaders responsible for safeguarding at Action for Children. The school has made use of the educational psychology services from a nearby local authority. Leaders have closely monitored the quality of this support and rightly identify that the support was not efficacious. I have asked the school's leaders to prioritise obtaining better support in this area.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector