

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Peter Rowe
Headteacher
Princes Risborough School
Merton Road
Princes Risborough
Buckinghamshire
HP27 0DT

Dear Mr Rowe

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Princes Risborough School

Following my visit to your academy on 10 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the academy was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good academy. Senior leaders and governors should take urgent action to:

- ensure that teachers make better use of information on pupils' progress from their starting points when they plan work, so that tasks set are challenging enough to enable pupils who need to catch up, particularly disadvantaged pupils and boys, to do so
- set higher standards for success and ensure that sufficient weight is given to pupils' progress when evaluating the effectiveness of actions taken
- improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils so that they have fewer gaps in their learning due to days missed from the academy
- significantly reduce low-level disruption and improve pupils' attitudes to learning.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, subject leaders and governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. I visited classes on two occasions. On the first I observed learning jointly with the headteacher. On the second, I made short visits to classes in science, English, technology, and mathematics. I also observed tutor-time activities in a number of classes and scrutinised a range of documents, including those which summarised recent improvements and support from external providers.

Context

Since my last visit, the acting Chair of the Governing Body has become the substantive Chair of the Governing Body and a new governor with extensive educational experience has been appointed.

Main findings

The checks you and other leaders have made on the effectiveness of the actions taken to bring about improvement have not been rigorous enough. As a result, some areas, such as behaviour, that needed development, have not yet received the attention they require. Improving the rigour of leaders' checks was the key area for development after my last visit to your school and despite some improvement, this remains an area of weakness.

Since my last visit, you and other leaders have worked hard and there have been some improvements in teaching and in pupils' achievement. The progress pupils made in some Key Stage 4 subjects in 2015, such as science, was better than it was in 2014. Teachers' marking is now more consistent and most teachers follow the academy's agreed policies. However, teaching has not improved quickly enough and gaps between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and others remain wide. You have sensibly streamlined your improvement priorities. You now rightly concentrate on three key areas: a relentless focus on highest classroom practice; consistency in managing pupils' behaviour; and ensuring rigorous accountability. However, these new and more focused priorities have not yet led to sufficient improvements in either teaching or behaviour. One key issue is the impact of temporary teachers on pupils' learning and behaviour. Not enough is being done to ensure that these teachers are as effective as they can be.

The GCSE results from 2015 show that, despite some improvements, significant gaps remain between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others. Pupils in some lessons visited, including disadvantaged pupils, were not being stretched enough. For example, in a mathematics lesson, nearly half the class had finished the test they were doing and were sitting for a period of time in silence doodling on paper or, in some cases, reading. Pupils who had finished were not using the time in a productive manner to enhance further their mathematical skills.

While overall attendance has improved, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains significantly below that of other pupils. Leaders have not yet developed an effective strategy for ensuring that all disadvantaged pupils regularly attend the academy so that they can make the rapid progress they need to catch up.

Leaders' judgements about pupils' behaviour are not accurate enough. Leaders rightly recognise that behaviour has improved but their expectations of what constitutes good behaviour are too low. As a result, they do not ensure that initial improvements in behaviour are thoroughly and systematically in place in all subjects at all times of the day. For example, although subject leaders help temporary staff to manage pupils' behaviour, this support is not universal. As a result, some pupils' conduct remains poor and disruptive to others' learning. Additionally, in a number of permanent teachers' classes, pupils show poor attitudes to learning. They speak while the teachers are explaining tasks to the whole class, they do not work hard enough when the teachers set them work to do and, in some classes, they ignore the teacher's instructions. Teachers do not always challenge the conduct of these pupils by employing the agreed procedures and their progress consequently slows.

The Chair of the Governing Body and other governors are very clear that the school needs to improve more rapidly. Effective use is made of the expertise within the governing body. For example, governors have a detailed grasp of the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching from their visits to see the academy at work. They provide helpful and robust feedback following their visits. Governors closely monitor the changes leaders have made to see if they are working well enough and rightly challenge leaders to make further improvements in a timely manner.

External support

External support has assisted the academy in targeting short-term, individual and small-group teaching more precisely. However, this support has not had enough impact on improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

The headteacher sensibly collaborates with other local school leaders. However, some teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders do not have a sufficiently strong grasp of the features of effective practice. This is because they do not work closely enough with good or better schools.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Buckinghamshire, the Education Funding Agency and the Secretary of State for Education.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector