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Emily Gent
Principal
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Dear Ms Gent

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Banbury Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 6 January 2016, 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 June 2014. 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 academy.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, the executive director of the academy trust and the chair of the local advisory board to discuss the action taken since my last visit. I scrutinised documents including the academy's most recent self-evaluation, the outcomes of monitoring activities and information about pupils' progress and behaviour. I met with a group of sixth form learners and a group of pupils from Key Stages 3 and 4, to find out their views of the academy.

Context

Since my last visit, the senior vice-principal, an assistant principal and the head of sixth form have left. Three new assistant principals have replaced them. Overall staff turnover has been high. One quarter of the teaching staff left last summer and a

further five teachers left at the end of last term. However, you have successfully recruited teachers who previously worked in good and outstanding schools. Consequently the academy is fully staffed with suitably qualified specialist teachers.

Main findings

Your actions to secure good teaching and behaviour are taking effect. Teaching has continued to improve. Pupils report noticeable improvements in mathematics and science. Staff turnover has not been a barrier. Improved tracking and analysis of pupils' progress enable leaders and governors to keep a tighter focus on achievement than was previously the case. Well considered assessment processes, including checks on marking and moderation of tests in areas such as science and mathematics, help ensure that the assessment information you collect is as accurate as possible. Pupils' achievement by the end of Key Stage 4 in 2015 was, overall, a little below national averages in English, mathematics and science. Academy information shows that pupils typically make better progress than was previously the case. The current Year 11 pupils are on track to achieve more than their predecessors this summer.

You have tightened your approach to supporting teachers tackling poor behaviour in lessons. You have increased leaders' availability to deal with issues and introduced a new electronic method for alerting leaders that support is needed which speeds up the 'on-call' process. As a result, leaders respond more swiftly to requests for support than previously. They now also make sure that pupils who have behaved poorly attend an after-school detention on the same day. Pupils remarked that 'on-call' now works and behaviour has improved as a result. Setting up an internal exclusion room, the 'Engage' room, has enabled you to reduce external exclusion and increase the support for some of your most vulnerable pupils. Incidents of bullying are also decreasing. Leaders keep a close eye on incidents of bullying and act to ensure these are resolved swiftly. Leaders maintain suitable records of these incidents and their subsequent resolution. However, they do not pull this information together sharply enough. They cannot see at a glance the impact of their work to reduce bullying over time or where they need to do more. Further action is needed to hone this area of work.

Pupils said that the academy is a tolerant place where people from different backgrounds and cultures get on well together. Pupils are clear about the severe consequences of racist behaviour and incidents of racist name-calling are increasingly rare. However, pupils have not had routine opportunities to learn about other faiths or equalities issues. Leaders are starting to address this as part of their work to strengthen the academy's approach to promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development and fundamental British values. You have increased tutorial time, known in the academy as mentor time, and moved it to the start of the day in a bid to make it a more productive time for promoting SMSC. You have also changed your approach to personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE). This will now be taught on 'deep learning days' which will take place several

times a year. However, leaders have not fully defined exactly what will be covered when. This needs further attention if you are to ensure that pupils in all year groups including the sixth form are fully prepared for life in modern Britain.

Some sixth-formers have had concerns about two occasions where their learning has been disrupted by unforeseen long-term staff absence. In both cases you responded swiftly, making sure a subject specialist was put in place to cover the absence. In one instance this included a lesson being moved to the end of the day, when a specialist teacher is available. This may not be ideal for some learners. However, it is a reasonable response given the circumstances. Sixth-formers spoken to appreciate that leaders acted quickly to minimise disruption to learning. Generally they view teaching in the sixth form as good. However, they are as not positive about other aspects of sixth form life. They do not feel consulted on issues that affect them, are unclear on the purpose or usefulness of mentor time and unimpressed with some of the support and advice provided. Leaders' work to address these issues and ensure best use is made of non-qualification time is at a relatively early stage. Swift action is needed to ensure that all aspects of the 16 to 19 study programmes are fully realised.

The local advisory board (LAB) continues to keep a close eye on the academy's performance. The recent decision to deal with staffing and financial matters at the district board provides a good opportunity for the LAB to further sharpen its focus on leadership of the curriculum, teaching and behaviour. Improved target setting and action planning helps the LAB hold leaders to account more effectively.

External support

You have made good use of opportunities to learn from outstanding schools in the trust as well as schools outside the trust. The introduction of the approach used at Magna Academy for helping pupils catch-up and attain well at Key Stage 4, is one good example of this. Another is the visit by leaders to the associate principal's previous school where they saw an 'Engage' room being used effectively.

I am copying this letter to the Chief Executive of the Aspirations Academy Trust, the chair of the local advisory board and the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton
Her Majesty's Inspector