

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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



3 November 2015

Ms Sue Jones
The Robert Smyth Academy
Burnmill Road
Market Harborough
Leicestershire
LE16 7JG

Dear Ms Jones

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Robert Smyth Academy

Following my visit to your school on 5 October 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 first monitoring inspection since the school 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 school was also judged to require improvement.

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.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and representatives of the governing body. The academy improvement planning was evaluated and you shared with me information regarding students' achievement. I spoke with a group of Year 11 students and a group of Year 12 students. Information about performance management and the ways in which leaders are monitoring the quality of teaching were discussed at length.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in March 2015, there have been significant changes to staffing, including changes at middle leadership level.

Main findings

Planning is in place to ensure that the issues raised during the last inspection are addressed effectively in order for the school to become good. The academy's information about students' achievement in 2015 indicates that the progress of disadvantaged students has improved. Additionally, more students are making the expected progress within English. You are aware that challenges remain regarding the performance of higher ability students, particularly those predicted to achieve A* grades. Challenges also remain regarding the performance of disabled students and those who have special educational needs. We discussed the plans you have in place to ensure these students make the progress they should, including the support of a specialist leader of education (SLE) to work alongside the academy's special educational needs coordinator (SENCo).

The way in which achievement information is understood by leaders is improving. A new information system has been implemented, and you said that there is now more clarity, leading to increased expectations as to what students should achieve. We discussed the urgency of ensuring that teachers could easily understand and access this information so that planning for learning is more precisely focused. The Year 11 students I spoke with said that, in some of their lessons, they did not feel they were challenged as much as they could be. School information still suggests that some students could make better progress.

The system for managing teachers' performance is now more robust. You have implemented the 'Teacher on a Page' strategy and have ensured that individual teacher targets reflect the priorities identified within the school development planning. For example, each teacher now has an individual target with a focus on students' progress. You feel that line managers are now more able to hold teachers to account. Additionally, you have planned a programme of universal professional development linked to whole-school priorities. Support and training is also available for individual staff in order that their practice rapidly improves.

The way in which the quality of teaching is monitored is now more closely focused on the progress that all students make over time. You have worked with external partners to calibrate the professional understanding of leaders about how to judge the quality of teaching and learning. You are involved in the Thomas Estley Learning Academy (TELA) peer challenge programme and feel that this has provided further opportunities to receive high-quality support and challenge.

The governing body knows that it has a role in holding leaders to account. Governors are right to ask: 'How do we know that the teaching is good and that all students make expected progress?' They agree that they must have an accurate way in which they can hold leaders to account. The Vice-chair of the Governing Body is aware of the urgency of this.

There have been many changes to staffing and this includes at middle leader level. You are mindful that there needs to be consistency across all subject areas and are making sure that leaders receive professional development and guidance. There are more regular meetings to discuss students' progress, and heads of faculty have been released from form tutor responsibilities in order to focus on specific student intervention work. You have large senior and middle leadership teams. You also have members of the teaching staff who have additional responsibilities. We discussed the need to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and that clear lines of accountability are in place. This is particularly the case in the leadership of the progress of disadvantaged students.

You have implemented PURE (Punctual, Uniform, Ready, Engaged) as a strategy to ensure that students arrive to lessons promptly, prepared and with the correct attitude to learning. Leaders conduct 'climate walks' and you have evidence to suggest that there are improvements in the expectations set for students. However, when asked, students indicated that their learning was often disturbed by the behaviour of others, particularly in the lower and middle-setted lessons. We spoke at length about the urgency of ensuring that appropriate learning behaviours were evident in all lessons.

There are many opportunities for students to engage in the life of the academy. Students said that they appreciated the relationships built with staff, and the care and support they receive. Opportunities are being missed to regularly involve students in informing leaders of what learning looks like for them. Those students I spoke with were extremely perceptive and had much to say.

Governors are highly committed to the academy. The Vice-chair of Governors provides particularly good support. There is an urgency to make sure that there are systems in place to further challenge leaders. Governors need to be absolutely clear that actions planned by leaders are having the impact they should have, and that evidence is provided to support this.

External support

The academy values its work with external partners, including Learning South Leicestershire and the Thomas Estley Learning Academy (TELA). You have appointed a school improvement partner to provide additional challenge and support.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Leicestershire.

Yours sincerely

Jayne Ashman

Her Majesty's Inspector