

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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



21 March 2016

Siobhan Hearne
Principal
The Latimer Arts College
Castle Way
Barton Seagrave
Kettering
Northamptonshire
NN15 6SW

Dear Ms Hearne

No formal designation monitoring inspection of The Latimer Arts College

Following my visit with Philip Drabble, Ofsted Inspector, to your college on 8 March 2016, 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 outcomes for pupils at the college.

Evidence

Inspectors considered a range of documents relating to the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes, including the college's own self-evaluation. Inspectors also scrutinised the college's single central record and other documentation relating to safeguarding and child protection. Inspectors met with the Principal and other senior leaders with responsibility for achievement, safeguarding, teaching and learning, behaviour and attendance, and the pupil premium. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and those children who are looked after by the local authority. Inspectors also met with subject leaders, groups of pupils from across all years in Key Stages 3 and 4, and members of the governing body. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative from the local authority. Inspectors observed 13 lessons, three of which were joint lesson observations involving the lead inspector and the Principal. An inspector observed form time. An inspector looked at a range of pupils' work from a range of subjects in Key Stages 3 and 4. He undertook this activity with the Principal. Inspectors spoke with pupils informally during breaktime and between lessons, when they also observed pupils' behaviour.

Context

The Latimer Arts College is larger than the average secondary school, with 1,076 pupils and learners on roll. The sixth form is below average in size. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is below average. However, the proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan is average. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils who arrive or leave the college part-way through the academic year is below average. Staffing at the college is now stable. In 2015, a significant number of staff were absent from the college for personal reasons. The college has recruited to vacant posts, although it has a vacant post for a mathematics teacher that it is currently unable to fill appropriately.

The Principal has maintained a sharp focus on ensuring that the college's provision meets the needs of its pupils and enables them to make the progress that they should. She has set high expectations both of her pupils and of her staff. Senior leaders closely monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. They take robust action where the quality of teaching or subject leadership is not as high as they expect. Consequently, outcomes for current pupils are improving in those subjects in Key Stage 4 that have not performed highly enough since the last inspection. Outcomes in these subjects are now close to or above national levels.

Senior leaders work closely with governors in developing the college's provision for its pupils. Governors are ambitious for the college and are insistent that the college's provision should meet pupils' needs and prepare them well for the next stage in their education, training or employment. To ensure that their view of the college's effectiveness is correct, governors receive regular information from senior leaders. They also undertake their own activities to ensure that the information they receive is accurate. Consequently, governors have a precise understanding of the college's strengths and its areas for development. Where governors feel that they require more information, they readily challenge senior leaders to provide it. For example, governors have recently insisted that the information they receive regarding how the college spends the pupil premium should be more detailed. Governors have made this request to ensure that their evaluation of the impact of the use of this additional government funding is even sharper still.

Governors do not accept any performance that does not meet their expectations. Where they identify such performance, they expect senior leaders to take swift action. Governors are also keen to secure further improvements in the college's provision for its pupils. For example, they have used their own experience of the world of work to enhance the college's 'Raising Aspirations and Growth Mind-Set' programme. This programme enables pupils from across all years to develop their understanding of enterprise and employment. This helps pupils to prepare more effectively for their next steps in education, training or employment.

Senior leaders have closely analysed the causes of the decline in outcomes in 2015 and have taken swift and robust action. For example, senior leaders have now resolved the staffing issues that had a significant impact upon the quality of teaching for pupils in the last academic year. Furthermore, senior leaders have reviewed the leadership of those subjects that did not perform highly enough. In so doing, senior leaders have ensured that those subject leaders have the necessary skills to bring about the required improvement. Current performance information indicates that pupils' outcomes in those subjects that performed less well last year have improved this year, particularly in French, religious studies, media studies, information technology and business studies.

Furthermore, senior leaders have reviewed the Key Stage 4 curriculum. Previously, senior leaders and governors had adopted a policy of entering pupils early for some of their GCSE examinations, including GCSE mathematics. Senior leaders and governors adopted this policy in order to provide pupils in Years 10 and 11 with several opportunities to improve their grade. Senior leaders have now ceased this practice for those pupils who are currently in Year 10. Because of this, subject leaders have reviewed the schemes of work to ensure that pupils develop the necessary skills over time to make the progress they should in their GCSE subjects at the end of Year 11. The college's own performance information indicates that higher proportions of Key Stage 4 pupils are likely to make the progress expected of them in their GCSE subjects, particularly in English and mathematics.

As part of this review of the Key Stage 4 curriculum, senior leaders have also reviewed the curriculum that their pupils in Key Stage 3 receive. The purpose of this review has been to ensure that pupils in Key Stage 3 are fully developing their skills, knowledge and understanding in preparation for their Key Stage 4 studies. As part of this curriculum review, senior leaders have adapted their systems for checking on pupils' progress in Key Stage 3. However, this has been a recent development. In some subjects, the system for checking on pupils' progress is currently not precise enough. In these subjects, senior leaders' view of pupils' outcomes is too low and does not match the close monitoring that subject leaders undertake. Senior leaders are working closely with subject leaders to address this issue.

Through the introduction of regular 'standards meetings', senior leaders have increased subject leaders' accountability for the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. Standards meetings are meetings at which subject leaders report to senior leaders and governors on the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes in their subject area. These meetings provide leaders at all levels, including governors, with a regular opportunity to gain a precise view of the performance of each subject area. The meetings enable senior leaders to evaluate the impact of any actions that subject leaders have taken to improve provision. These meetings have also enabled senior leaders to ensure that subjects contribute effectively to achieving whole-college priorities. For example, subject leaders have recently worked closely with teachers in their subject areas to ensure that lessons offer pupils appropriate challenge. This has been in response to senior leaders raising the issue of challenge in the classroom as a whole-college priority.

Subject leaders regularly review the progress that pupils are making. Subject leaders have adopted effective procedures to ensure that the performance information that teachers provide is accurate. They closely analyse this information to identify pupils who are falling behind and to provide the support that these pupils need to catch up. Subject leaders regularly review the impact of these interventions to ensure that they are enabling pupils to make rapid enough progress.

The college has robust systems in place for monitoring the quality of teaching. Subject leaders work closely with senior leaders to review the quality of teaching through visiting lessons, checking the quality of pupils' work and speaking with pupils. Where subject leaders identify teachers who are not performing to the level that they expect, they ensure that these teachers receive the necessary support to improve their practice. For example, these teachers are able to work with colleagues whose classroom practice is strong. Senior leaders rightly recognise that they need to make sure that they develop this culture of sharing best practice further.

In those lessons that inspectors observed where learning was most effective, pupils had good relationships with their teachers and demonstrated positive attitudes to their learning. Teachers had good subject knowledge and created activities that engaged pupils' interest, enabling them to make progress in their understanding. In a Year 9 drama lesson, for example, the teacher encouraged pupils to work together to produce a piece of drama. Pupils engaged well with the activity and were able to learn well from each other. Teachers also provided opportunities for pupils to tackle increasingly difficult tasks so that they might further develop their understanding and skills. In a Year 8 mathematics lesson, for example, pupils were able to choose from a range of tasks to develop their skills in calculating percentages. Pupils worked enthusiastically on the tasks, with many choosing to complete a more difficult task once they felt secure in their understanding.

Senior leaders have put into place effective strategies to raise the achievement and attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Senior leaders work closely with those disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent. These pupils now receive closer support to ensure that they attend more regularly. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attend regularly has increased and is now above national levels.

Senior leaders have also ensured that disadvantaged pupils receive the necessary support to ensure that they make rapid progress in their learning. For those who have weak literacy skills, the college has introduced a new programme to develop these skills more effectively. Because of this programme, the pupils who receive this support have made rapid progress in their reading skills. Disadvantaged pupils who are falling behind also receive intervention that is appropriate to their needs. Owing to this, disadvantaged pupils' achievement across the college is improving. For example, the gaps in progress between those pupils who are disadvantaged and other pupils nationally are closing rapidly at GCSE in Years 10 and 11. Furthermore, the college's performance information indicates that gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in Key Stage 3 are also closing. Senior leaders work closely with governors to review the effectiveness of the intervention they put

in place using the pupil premium. They do not continue with any interventions that they identify as not being sufficiently effective.

Achievement in the vocational subjects in the sixth form is very good. Learners' outcomes in academic courses, however, reflect some underperformance. Senior leaders have rightly identified this as a priority for the college. They have taken swift action to ensure that teaching is sufficiently effective to enable learners to make better progress, particularly in English language. For example, the college has engaged more closely with a local school to enable teachers to share best practice. Senior leaders have also ensured that learners receive closer support from their tutors so that they make the progress they should. For example, learners now complete a 'Passport to Success'. This allows learners to review their progress at regular intervals and consider how they can develop their skills for the next stage of their education, training or employment. Consequently, learners now receive more focused support from their tutors and teachers. Because of this, learners are more confident in their knowledge, understanding and skills. Furthermore, their preparation for the next step in their education, training or employment is more effective.

External support

The local authority has worked more closely with the college this year. This has enabled the college to validate its own self-evaluation and review the system by which it checks the progress pupils make in Key Stage 3.

The college works closely with a local school in order to provide a more comprehensive range of opportunities to its learners in the sixth form. This collaboration has also enabled teachers to develop their teaching skills for academic qualifications in the sixth form through sharing best practice with colleagues from the local school.

The college also works with several collaborative groups of schools in order to check the rigour of its own performance information. This has enabled senior leaders and subject leaders to ensure that the performance information that teachers provide on a regular basis is accurate. Working with these schools has also enabled teachers to sharpen their classroom practice through further opportunities to share good practice.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase opportunities for teachers to share best practice to ensure that all teaching is as effective as the best, including in the sixth form.
- Further develop the system by which senior leaders monitor pupils' outcomes in Key Stage 3 to ensure that the system fully complements the new curriculum and provides a precise view of pupils' achievement across all subjects.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hollingsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector