

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



4 July 2016

Mr P Ottley-O'Connor
Interim Principal
The Hereford Academy
Marlbrook Road
Redhill
Hereford
HR2 7NG

Dear Mr Ottley-O'Connor

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of The Hereford Academy

Following my visit to your school on 21 June 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in November 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, the vice-principal, members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body, and school and curriculum leaders. I also met with the school's new principal who is due to start at the school in September 2016. I held a telephone conversation with the chief executive officer from the academy's sponsor, the Bishop Anthony Educational Trust. I visited a number of classes in mathematics, French, English and history in Years 7, 8 and 9. During these visits I talked to the pupils about their learning, work, behaviour and progress. I also evaluated pupils' progress and attitudes to learning through a scrutiny of pupils' books. Information on the school's website, the single central record and other documents relating to pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour were scrutinised. The implementation of the trust's statement of action and the school's action plan was analysed.

Context

Since the previous inspection, you have reorganised the associate staff structure. As a result, 11 associate staff have left the school. Teachers from a range of subjects

are leaving the school at the end of the term. Due to a drop in pupil numbers, you are not replacing teachers in mathematics, art, drama, geography and science. During this inspection, Year 10 pupils were sitting internal school examinations. The school has appointed a substantive principal who will take up his post in September 2016.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You, the governing body and the trust accept the findings of the section 5 inspection and have acted quickly and effectively to address the areas for improvement identified at the time of the inspection. The trust's statement of action and the school's action plan identify suitable priorities and actions and deadlines for when actions should be completed. You have reviewed the plans and rated the progress towards meeting your targets. The review shows that the plans are being implemented effectively. The trust and governors state an ambition that the school will be judged to be at least good by May 2017.

You and the governors recognised that the school's curriculum was not fit for purpose. As a result, you restructured the curriculum and the school day. You have increased the number of lessons taught in a day from four to five. Pupils in Years 7 to 11 now have lessons in personal, social and health education, including careers information, advice and guidance, and religious education. The post-16 curriculum has been adapted to better suit the abilities, needs and aspirations of the students. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is actively promoted through a range of lessons and activities that include assemblies and visiting religious leaders. The school's values of 'community, service, trust and endurance' are actively promoted and permeate the life of the school. The recent 'values week' reinforced the school's values and helped to develop pupils' understanding of British values.

You have challenged underperformance and raised teachers' and pupils' ambitions and expectations. You and the governors have held teachers and leaders to account for the progress of pupils in their classes or curriculum area. Staff's performance management is now used successfully to set and review targets and ensure training is bespoke to need. Some staff not able to meet the leaders' high expectations have left the school. The quality of learning, teaching and assessment across a range of subjects is improving. However, you recognise that the quality of teaching in science needs to improve further so that pupils make rapid and sustained progress in this subject.

The quality of information the school has about pupils' achievement has improved significantly, particularly in key stage 3. Curriculum leaders now have timely and valuable information about individuals' progress and attainment in each year group across the school. School leaders review and analyse this information at three-weekly 'raising attainment' meetings. As a result, pupils who are underperforming are quickly identified and supported. Curriculum leaders told me that these meetings help them to better understand how they can use the information to raise

standards. They also told me that you have 'freed them' from having to complete irrelevant and time-consuming administrative tasks that had no impact on raising standards. As a consequence, they have more time to focus on improving teaching and supporting pupils not doing well.

Information provided by the school shows that pupils' progress in English and mathematics is improving, particularly in Years 7, 8, 10 and 11. However, the information shows that pupils' attainment and progress in GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 is likely to be below the 2015 national figures. However, the gap between pupils who are disadvantaged and other pupils in the school is closing. School leaders recognise that pupils' progress in Year 9 is below that expected. The information also shows that the most able pupils are not doing well enough in a range of subjects.

You recognise that, while improvements are evident in the teaching of English, pupils' writing – particularly their handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar – needs to improve. Pupils told me that the teaching of mathematics is generally engaging, interesting and set at the right level. However, the work in pupils' books shows that not all pupils have sufficient opportunities to solve increasingly difficult problems or to explain why they have used a particular mathematical method or approach or how they arrived at their answer. In addition, the most able pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to deepen or develop their knowledge and understanding.

Curriculum leaders told me that they are now more involved in monitoring the quality of teaching and assessment. They say that an increasing number of teachers apply the school's marking policy consistently and that, as a result, the majority of pupils know how to improve their work. Curriculum leaders are aware that some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain but they intervene quickly when teachers or pupils do not meet the standards expected.

School leaders have raised the expectations of how pupils should behave in and out of class. The atmosphere in the school is calm and purposeful. Pupils who spoke with me said that pupils' behaviour has generally improved. However, the 'raising of the bar' has resulted in an increased number of fixed-term exclusions. While the number of exclusions is showing an overall decline from a peak in December 2015, you recognise that the number of fixed-term exclusions needs to be reduced. Since the inspection in November 2015, pupils' attendance has fallen below national figures and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent (missing 10% of lessons) has increased. School leaders are employing a range of suitable approaches and procedures to address this increase in pupils' absence. For example, parents are contacted on the child's first day of absence and the pupil's home is visited when the absence is prolonged.

Governors have worked effectively with school leaders and the trust to communicate an ambitious vision and strategic direction for the school's future. The chair of the governing body has worked diligently to make sure that all governors

are effective in their role. As a result, some governors have stepped down and four new, experienced, skilled and knowledgeable governors have joined the board. Governors provide an appropriate balance between challenge and support and you say that governors are 'on it' if pupils are not doing well or teachers fail to meet expectations. Governors have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and act promptly to address issues that block or hinder pupils' progress. However, the external review of the school's use of the pupil premium that was recommended at the previous inspection has not been completed. This was due to the original review being cancelled by the individual carrying out the evaluation. Governors say that the review is now planned to take place in July 2016. In addition, governors have not made sure that the school's website and policies comply fully with current guidance. For example, the school's accessibility plan has not been reviewed within the three years stipulated.

Safeguarding is effective. You, your leadership team and governors make sure that protecting pupils from harm and supporting potentially vulnerable pupils and their families is a high priority. Staff understand their safeguarding duties and have the necessary knowledge and understanding to make sure pupils are safe. For example, pupils at risk of radicalisation or of behaving in an extremist way have been referred to the counter terrorism unit. School leaders and governors make sure that the checks on staff's suitability to work with children are thorough and rigorous.

The academy trust provides effective support. For example, the trust has provided assistance to the governing body to improve financial planning and the restructuring of the associate staff team. The school is working with a number of schools to improve staff's skills and understanding. For example, staff are working with eight schools to moderate the levels awarded to pupils' work. In addition, the school is working with the Marlbrook Teaching School Alliance and Wigmore Teaching School Alliance to provide support for the leadership of religious education, information and communication technology and science. Staff training is also being provided by the teaching school alliances. For example, a number of staff have completed the outstanding teacher and the improving teacher programmes. The quality of teaching and the effectiveness of the majority of leaders are improving as a result.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose and is being implemented effectively.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose and is being implemented effectively.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Herefordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries
Her Majesty's Inspector