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8 September 2017

Chris Steed  
Principal  
Malcolm Arnold Academy  
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Dear Mr Steed

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Malcolm Arnold Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 19 July 2017, 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 May 2016. 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that leaders at all levels are supported to be effective in their new roles
- improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils
- develop strategies to improve attendance more quickly, particularly among disadvantaged pupils.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders, pupils, and a representative of the David Ross Education Trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also spoke by telephone with the chair of the academy improvement board. I spoke with a group of pupils and with other pupils in their lessons. With the associate principal, I visited eight classrooms to see pupils at work. I considered a range of documents, including the school's improvement and action plans and I scrutinised the school's single central record of recruitment checks. I examined work in pupils' books to evaluate the quality of their learning. I met with a group of staff to discuss how they had been supported to improve their practice.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection, there have been several changes to leadership. You have been appointed to a trust-wide role, supporting academy improvement for two days a week, while retaining your role as principal at the school. One of the deputy headteachers has been appointed as associate principal. An assistant headteacher has taken responsibility for progress in the sixth form. You have also appointed two new assistant headteachers, with responsibility for curriculum development and progress in key stage 3 respectively. At the end of this term, one of the deputy headteachers will be leaving the school, to take up a post within the trust, and one of the assistant headteachers is moving to a part-time position in the school, also relinquishing her leadership responsibilities.

There have also been changes to staffing elsewhere in the school. Since the last inspection, 13 teaching staff have left and a further 17 are due to leave their posts at the end of this term, including the subject leaders for history, music, modern foreign languages and religious education, and the head of sixth form. You have made a number of new appointments and the school will be fully staffed in September 2017.

## **Main findings**

Leaders have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have rightly prioritised improvements to behaviour and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders have created a positive culture where staff are supported to develop and improve their practice. There is very much a sense of everyone pulling together to drive improvement.

The associate principal has led developments in teaching, learning and assessment throughout the school. Following analysis of examination results, she supported all teachers to review and self-evaluate their practice. This process, together with monitoring activities, identified each teacher's strengths and areas in need of development. This information was used in discussions between teachers and

middle leaders to design a bespoke support and development programme for each member of staff. All teaching staff have been involved in training and development activities, working on a cycle of research, application and review. These have enabled leaders to ensure that identified staff receive the support they need to improve. The support programme has also led to the sharing of good practice and contributed to a collaborative approach to school improvement. All staff are involved and motivated to continue to improve. Staff are hugely appreciative of the benefits this has made to their practice. Middle leaders are also more involved in checking the quality of provision in their areas. For example, they have adapted and amended monitoring activities, within the whole-school monitoring framework, to ensure that priority is given to developments and improvements that are most pertinent to their areas.

Leaders have developed a more robust system to track pupils' progress. Pupils undertake standardised assessments, which are moderated across the trust. Following each assessment point, senior leaders meet subject leaders to discuss pupils' progress and the action being taken to help pupils make faster progress. Middle leaders are thus empowered to hold class teachers to account. You and the trust are aware that several leaders at all levels are new to their post or will join the school at the start of the new school year. You expect to provide support to ensure that they quickly become fully effective.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved considerably. Leaders have ensured that teachers use information about what pupils are able to achieve to plan learning activities that meet their different needs. Staff make greater use of assessment information to identify gaps in pupils' learning. Teachers monitor pupils' attainment and progress and particular learning needs, recording these on 'green sheets' which they use to guide their planning. This strategy is used throughout the school. In mathematics and science, for example, pupils were observed working on individual activities, designed to help them to make faster progress in areas where they had previously struggled. Pupils say that this personalised provision supports their learning. In addition, a key priority for the school has been to ensure that teachers provide work that is suitably challenging. In the lessons that I visited, and in pupils' books, it is clear that teachers now have higher expectations of what pupils are able to achieve and are planning their work accordingly.

Since the last inspection, leaders have taken a more strategic approach to timetabling, specifically regarding the allocating of teaching staff to classes. The new approach has ensured that the most appropriate teacher is allocated to each class. This, alongside improvements throughout the school, has contributed to improvements in the quality of teaching at key stage 3.

The last inspection identified the need to ensure that pupils' attainment and progress in key stage 4 and the sixth form improved. Leaders have introduced a system of target setting that has raised expectations of what pupils, and particularly

disadvantaged pupils, are able to achieve. Pupils are making faster progress than in the past. In most subjects, pupils are making good progress. In a number of subjects, including English, science and French, they are making rapid progress. Although pupils are currently making faster progress in humanities subjects than in recent years, progress in these subjects remains slower than in others. In the sixth form, students are also making faster progress, particularly in Year 12.

You have made changes to the pastoral leadership of the school, increasing capacity by appointing assistants to support leaders of each key stage. One of the deputy headteachers has successfully led considerable work to improve pupils' behaviour and attendance.

Pupils have responded well to raised expectations of behaviour. Leaders have ensured that expectations of pupils' behaviour and the systems with which staff manage it are much clearer. Staff and pupils understand the behaviour management system and follow it with consistency. Pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around school. There is little low-level disruption and pupils say that their learning is rarely disturbed. Pupils appreciate the improvements that have been made in this aspect of the school's work and say that it has helped their learning. The overall number of exclusions has decreased and the number of exclusions of disadvantaged pupils has decreased considerably.

There is a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere around the school. Pupils are friendly, polite and supportive of one another. In the visits I made to lessons, I noted pupils collaborating well and helping each other to solve problems. On the day of the monitoring visit, a small group of pupils participated in a music performance at breaktime. A very large number of pupils and staff gathered to listen and enthusiastically demonstrated their appreciation.

Attendance is improving, albeit very slowly. Whole-school attendance and that of disadvantaged pupils remain below the national averages. This remains a priority for the school. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school, however, has reduced and is now below the national average.

Since the last inspection, one of the assistant headteachers has taken responsibility for the provision in the sixth form. Supported by one of the deputy headteachers, this has strengthened the leadership of this aspect of the school. Leaders have ensured greater rigour in how the progress of post-16 students is tracked and evaluated by adopting whole-school practices of review and evaluation. The 'assessment point' meetings that are established in key stages 3 and 4 are now incorporated into the evaluation of sixth-form provision and achievement. This means that leaders now identify students who are falling behind and intervene appropriately.

Leaders have taken action to improve the quality of careers information, advice and guidance in the sixth form and elsewhere in the school. For example, students and

pupils have participated in a variety of external visits and in-school events. Leaders have amended the curriculum to promote a better understanding of careers and future pathways. From September 2017, students and pupils will receive a discrete careers, advice and guidance lesson each week, delivered by senior staff.

### **External support**

The trust has provided effective support in taking action in the areas identified as needing improvement. Close working relationships between the trust and school leaders have ensured that clear priorities are driven both within the school and through external support. For example, middle leaders have benefited from networking opportunities and teaching staff have learned from good practice elsewhere by visiting other schools within the trust. Clear plans are in place to continue to draw on collaborative support through the trust. Those responsible for governance provide effective support and appropriate challenge.

I am copying this letter to the chairs of the trust, the academy improvement board and the local governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Peterborough, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Mosley  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**