

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



5 July 2018

Mr Roger Burman
Executive Principal
The Aylesbury Vale Academy
Paradise Orchard
Aylesbury
Buckinghamshire
HP18 0WS

Dear Mr Burman

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of The Aylesbury Vale Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 27 June 2018 with Ali Dakin, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Suzanne Richards and Christopher Crouch, Ofsted Inspectors, 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 us 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 inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in November 2016. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

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

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

Yours sincerely

Lucy English
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2016.

- Raise outcomes for pupils in all key stages so that they are consistently better than national averages and that the gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally closes rapidly.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in all parts of the school by:
 - sharing the strong practice that exists already in isolated pockets across each phase
 - continuing the process begun in April 2016 of tackling teachers' weaker performance, especially in the secondary phase
 - implementing focused, rigorous staff performance management and effective, purposeful training.
- Strengthen the leadership and management of the whole school so that there are consistent policies, procedures and practices from the Nursery provision right the way to the top by:
 - reforming the governing body so that it is able to hold school leaders regularly and rigorously to account, as well as providing appropriate support to the new executive principal
 - clarifying leadership and management responsibilities
 - establishing school-wide leaders for safeguarding, assessment and staff training, and for supporting groups of pupils facing potential barriers to learning
 - creating school-wide practice in, among other things, safeguarding, assessment, teachers' professional learning and the management of practice for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken by a professional team independent of the sponsor and the local authority.

An external review of governance should also be undertaken, commissioned by the sponsors but carried out by persons independent of current governors and the local authority.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 27 June 2018

Evidence

The inspectors met with the executive principal, the vice principal and headteacher of the primary phase as well as other senior leaders, middle leaders and groups of teachers in order to evaluate the effectiveness of their work addressing the areas for improvement outlined in the previous inspection. We also met with the chair of the governing body and representatives of the school's sponsor, the Diocese of Oxford. We visited classes in all year groups across a wide range of subjects in all phases of the school. The majority of these visits were carried out jointly with school leaders. We spoke with pupils during these visits and around the school, including at break and lunchtimes. We also met with groups of pupils formally and looked at their work in their books.

Inspectors spoke informally with parents and carers before the start of the school day and considered parents' and carers' responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the school's own surveys of parents and carers.

We considered a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and action plans, minutes of governing body meetings, reviews of the effectiveness of additional funding and attendance information. The school's single central record was checked, and an inspector spoke with the designated safeguarding lead.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, a large number of teachers have left the school. New teachers have joined the school, some of whom have been appointed on permanent contracts. A small number of classes are currently taught by agency staff. The school is fully staffed for September.

The Diocese of Oxford became the sole sponsor of the school in April 2018. There have been further changes to the governing body with a governor leaving and others joining.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

The executive principal has continued his determined drive for improvement across the school. He has used his accurate knowledge and understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school to prioritise actions that are making a difference. He is resolute in his ambition for the school, its staff, pupils and families, and is well aware of the work still to be done.

Leaders across the school share the executive principal's aspirations and passion. They all work together effectively in order to raise standards. They recognise that there is still much to do but have achieved a notable shift in culture, with raised aspirations and expectations across the school. The leadership capacity in the school is strong because the executive principal has ensured that the right people

have the right responsibilities. They understand their roles, have been well trained in order to undertake them and are held to account for the difference that their work makes for pupils.

The chair of the governing body continues to provide intelligent challenge and hold leaders to account. There are clear lines of accountability, and governors now meet their statutory duties. The sharp and focused challenge provided by governors has accelerated the pace of improvement. The records of their meetings show that they drill down into leaders' evaluations of actions to make sure that they understand how these support school improvements. At all times, the needs of the pupils are paramount. They have continued to work well with the education officers from the Diocese of Oxford because they are all working towards the same goal.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders have continued to provide effective professional development that is improving the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment throughout the school. Leaders have maintained their insistence on a consistent approach to lesson planning and assessment. This has helped to embed their 'non-negotiables' for staff and pupils and reduced some of the variability in practice. Leaders visit lessons regularly and know the strengths and weaknesses of professional practice. They have put in place personalised programmes that have been effective in developing teachers' and teaching assistants' skills. Staff are highly appreciative of what they describe as open and honest challenge and support, recognising the difference that it is making to their work.
- Through this work, leaders are establishing a culture of learning among staff. Staff have raised their expectations of pupils and regularly meet to share ideas and strategies to help meet pupils' needs. Teachers are particularly appreciative of the 'open lesson' weeks, where they undertake developmental observations of their peers across the school. There has also been more cross-phase work. For example, teachers in the primary phase have supported their colleagues in the secondary phase to improve their work with pupils who need to catch up with their literacy skills. Mathematics teachers in the secondary phase have helped their colleagues in the primary phase.
- Leaders have ensured that staff know the barriers to learning for those pupils who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. They have provided effective training that has helped teachers to plan to meet these pupils' needs. Consequently, this group of pupils are making stronger progress than previously. Their attainment across the school is broadly in line with that of their peers. Leaders are acutely aware of the need to continue this work alongside the extensive work already in place to raise aspirations and prepare pupils for their next steps.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is also improving. The new special education needs coordinator (SENCo) has carried out a thorough analysis of pupils' needs and staff skills. Working with an adviser from the diocese, she has created a well-considered plan to support staff to routinely meet these pupils' needs. For example, she has provided training so

that staff understand how to use the information from pupils' provision maps when planning lessons. When this information is used, staff are effective in providing learning activities that meet pupils' needs. The attendance of this group of pupils has improved this academic year. School information shows that they are making stronger progress than previously.

- Leaders' determination to drive up standards is showing success in pupils' outcomes. Overall, pupils are securing better outcomes than previously. School information indicates that children in Reception Year have improved their overall performance so that it is in line with national averages. In key stage 1, this information shows that pupils have attained in line with national averages, with more attaining greater depth. The picture is more varied in key stage 2, and leaders have an accurate understanding of the steps required to address this. Outcomes in the secondary phase have risen in English, mathematics and science, with pupils making better progress than previously. School information also indicates that leaders' work to improve outcomes in history and geography has been successful for pupils in Years 10 and 11. The information presented about outcomes of students in the sixth form also shows improvements when compared with previous years.
- Leaders have continued to raise expectations across the school with regard to pupils' behaviour. The overwhelming majority of pupils who spoke with inspectors said that this was vastly improved and that far fewer lessons were disrupted due to poor behaviour. Leaders have provided effective training that has increased the consistency with which staff use the clear behaviour systems. School records show that the systems are becoming more effective, with the higher sanctions, including fixed-term exclusions, being applied to fewer pupils. Work to prevent bullying has also been effective, and the vast majority of pupils spoken to said that bullying was now rare and that staff were effective at sorting out any bullying that did happen. Leaders' work to safeguard pupils remains effective. Processes for checking the suitability of adults to work with children are robust, and staff training is frequent and effective. Drop-down days are used to allow greater time to be spent teaching pupils how to keep themselves safe, including from dangers such as radicalisation. Leaders are aware of the need to continually check that this learning is embedded.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Leaders are acutely aware that their work to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is ongoing. This is partly due to difficulties with recruitment and subsequent turbulence in staffing that mean leaders have to continually induct staff and support them to meet the needs of the pupils. Leaders have responded well to this issue, providing personalised professional development, but it means that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school is still not consistently strong.
- Leaders are aware that their evaluations of the work undertaken to support disadvantaged pupils would benefit from a sharper focus that links actions to the barriers to learning they are trying to address. They understand that this will help them to further refine their approaches.

- Classroom support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is too varied. The SENCo's work to train staff to adapt learning activities to support these pupils is not embedded and therefore not having the impact intended. Leaders' own monitoring indicates that not enough staff routinely meet the expectations outlined by the SENCo.
- Leaders have not monitored closely pupils' outcomes in wider subjects across the secondary phase. They have a clear system that supports pupils on an individual and subject level, but senior leaders do not yet have a clear view of pupils' progress in subjects other than English, mathematics, science, history and geography. They have considered the progress of disadvantaged pupils but have not analysed progress information in terms of other groups of pupils, for example by prior attainment. Consequently, governors are not able to hold leaders to account for pupils' progress across the curriculum in the secondary phase.
- Leaders are aware of the continued work required to support pupils' personal development, behaviour and well-being. Leaders' work to improve attendance has had varying success. Leaders have created detailed plans to address this and are working with an appropriate sense of urgency. However, actions have not yet had the required impact. Leaders are also working to improve pupils' aspirations and attitudes to learning. For example, some teachers have to work very hard to get pupils to engage with learning activities. Additionally, low-level disruption is still an issue in pockets of the school. A minority of pupils and parents raised concerns about how leaders deal with bullying. Inspectors found no evidence to support these concerns, but leaders are aware of the need to work closely with this minority of pupils to address these worries.

External support

The Diocese of Oxford has provided effective support to the school. The director of education for the diocese has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Along with her advisers, she uses this to address specific issues, for example provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. The diocese took up sole sponsorship in April 2018, but its advisers have provided over 30 days of focused support since September 2017. They share the determination to secure school improvement expressed by all leaders involved with the school.

The executive principal has also brokered specific support from other local providers and experts where it is needed. This has been effective because it is precisely focused on the needs identified by leaders.