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Philip Shackleton
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Dear Mr Shackleton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Oldbury Academy

Following my visit to your school on 24 January 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- undertake an external review of the work being done to support those pupils who are disadvantaged
- evaluate the work of the governing body to support them in focusing strategically upon the key aspects in the school which require further improvements.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, members of the governing body and pupils to discuss actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Learning walks were undertaken, including with the headteacher, meetings were held with middle

leaders and relevant documentation was looked at, including the school's own monitoring activities.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been additions to, and developments within, the senior leadership team. These have had a focus upon those areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Some middle leaders have joined the school since the previous inspection. There is a mix of experience across leadership and a clear team approach is evident. Leaders and governors are considering the future of the sixth form given the declining numbers.

Main findings

You know the school well and, with governors, are determined to make it as effective as you can to improve the life chances for young people. Your ambition is matched by realism in terms of where standards are currently. Leaders at all levels, with the full support of governors, are determined to identify and address ongoing weaknesses. There have been some improvements, particularly since September; nonetheless, there is still much to do.

School documentation is detailed but, at times, there is too much information. Leaders do not have a precise, sharp and focused approach. There is, however, acknowledgement in self-evaluation and governor documents that much work is needed to improve the school further. This includes concerns about areas such as English, science, humanities and outcomes for certain groups, especially disadvantaged pupils. Governors are currently paying close attention to the recruitment and retention of staff.

Middle leaders are ambitious and realistic. They feel far more accountable for the success of their departments than they did at the previous inspection. There are regular meetings with senior leaders, when middle leaders are tasked to provide key information about standards and provision within their areas of responsibility. At times, middle leaders will also meet with governors to share information. Strengths seen within middle leadership, particularly those within the sports department and mathematics, are shared across the school. For example, the mathematics tracking system is used as a 'blueprint' for other middle leaders to use and adapt to suit their subject specialisms. Previously, senior leaders oversaw middle leaders' meetings. These are now chaired by the middle leaders themselves. There is increasing work with other schools to collaborate, quality assure and share best practice, and this is having a beneficial effect.

Outcomes in 2018 were mixed. While there were improvements in English and particularly in science, the progress pupils make in these subjects remains slow. Improvements in mathematics were more marked and pupils who left Year 11 in 2018 made average progress. In other subjects in 2018, progress was weak,

including in humanities and the EBacc subjects.

Disadvantaged pupils are not yet making the progress they are capable of. The school receives extra funding to support these pupils. This funding has not been used well to date. Leaders' analysis of pupils' performance over time has lacked clarity. Leaders, including governors, are now fully aware that even greater priority needs to be given to this group of underachieving pupils.

Current pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are performing better than previously. Information to support this was verified with visits to classrooms, scrutiny of pupils' work and in discussions with leaders. Leaders feel that these improvements are the result of systems becoming embedded and better training for staff, which is more focused. Also, younger pupils now have less of a legacy of poor teaching. While some improvements have been made since the last inspection, disappointing outcomes in 2018 have acted as a further spur to leaders. A greater pace of improvement is now evident across the school.

An ambition for high-quality teaching and learning lies at the heart of the school's mission. Leaders are fully aware, however, that there is too much variability within teaching. Moreover, there is inconsistency in how some teachers apply school expectations. This is seen in the variable quality of pupils' work. Some books contain work which is clearly stretching pupils' thinking and in which they take pride. Other books contain work which students find either too hard or too easy and, in places, some incomplete work.

Governors are committed and ambitious for further improvement. They use national support systems to keep themselves aware of changes in the sector. However, governors are not yet using the school's data as well as they might to assess which subjects or areas of the school's work need improving. Governors would benefit from an external review in order to develop greater precision and focus upon the priority areas in need of improvement.

My visits to lessons indicated a calm, purposeful atmosphere. Relations between pupils and teachers are positive. Teachers encourage pupils to discuss their work. Pupils were all happy to share their books and to talk about what they were learning. It is also clear, however, that because of inconsistency in approach and teaching quality overall, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

Pupils with whom I met formally and informally were all polite and personable. Every pupil said this is a safe school. Although largely positive about the school, some pupils commented about inconsistencies in teaching and behaviour management. Older pupils are positive about the differences you have made as headteacher during their time at school. These pupils feel that their teachers want what is best for them.

Your leaders responsible for attendance and behaviour are working effectively and

improvements are evident. Attendance at school has improved. At the previous inspection, you were advised to reduce exclusions and you have done so. At the same time, there has been a reduction in internal exclusions, which indicates that behaviour at the school has improved. However, pupils say that, on average, some low-level disruption to learning occurs in a fifth of their lessons.

While the absence and exclusion levels of disadvantaged pupils have fallen, they are still disproportionately high in relation to those of their peers. For example, 60% of those pupils who are persistently absent are disadvantaged. Leaders are aware that ongoing work is required to address this issue.

External support

Leaders have brokered support for the improvement of teaching through Lightwoods Teaching Alliance and Red Hill School, which is part of the Stour Vale Academy Trust. There has been work undertaken in English and science. This includes specialist leaders of education supporting both subjects. You have worked with St Michael's School to moderate work. There would be benefit in the school gaining further external support in the areas of governance and supporting disadvantaged pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Nigel Griffiths
Ofsted Inspector