

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Karen Begley
Head of School
Medina College
Fairlee Road
Newport
Isle of Wight
PO30 2DX

Dear Miss Begley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Medina College

Following my visit to your school on 19 March 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 three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections, in November 2017, March 2015 and March 2013.

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

The school should take further action to:

- use monitoring information precisely to evaluate, refine and improve the impact of their actions on outcomes for pupils
- ensure that attendance across the school and outcomes for pupils currently in Year 11 improve urgently.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher of the federation, you and senior staff from Medina College to discuss the actions taken

since the last inspection. I also met with groups of Year 10 pupils, middle leaders and governors and with a representative of the local authority. Alongside one of your assistant headteachers, I visited six lessons to observe learning and talk to pupils about their work. I reviewed the school's central record of recruitment checks on staff, and other relevant information from the school's website and provided by school leaders.

Context

The executive headteacher joined the federation in January 2018, shortly after the school's previous section 5 inspection. The governing body has changed how it works, moving from a committee structure to all meetings now being of the whole governing body. A restructuring of senior leadership across the federation is currently under way, with the first phase completed in September 2018 and further changes expected to be in place from June 2019. Increasingly, senior leadership roles operate across the federation.

Main findings

Much has changed since the previous inspection. The new executive headteacher has taken sensible steps to bring the federation's three components – Medina College, its sixth-form provision on a separate site, and Carisbrooke College – together. As a result, a common sense of purpose is supporting you and your team in making the improvements that are needed at Medina. Leaders and governors have a shared and accurate view of the school's priorities. The federation improvement plan assists you effectively in your work, providing a useful focus and a structure to guide your checks on the progress being made. This helps you, governors and your senior colleagues to hold other staff and leaders to account for the timeliness of their work. Middle leaders are increasingly involved in monitoring standards in the school. They have more ownership than in the past of the information they gather about standards in their areas of responsibility. At times, middle and senior leaders' reflections are too focused on the actions that have been completed, rather than the difference they are making to pupils' outcomes and experiences. Consequently, some aspects of the school's performance, such as attendance and pupils' achievements by the end of Year 11, have not improved sufficiently since the last inspection. Some improvement strategies are recently in place, so have not had time to have a strong positive impact on standards across the school. On a more encouraging note, younger pupils, and especially those in Year 7, are making good progress across almost all their subjects.

Expectations for standards of teaching and learning have been raised. Teachers have useful information that helps them to plan for pupils' different needs, linked to suitably aspirational targets for their attainment and progress. Cross-federation leadership roles are enabling good practice to be shared well across Medina College, which is developing staff expertise successfully. The curriculum has been restructured to ensure that pupils' learning experiences are sufficiently broad and

balanced. As a result, pupils' engagement with their learning has improved, and low-level disruption in lessons is notably reduced. During my visit, the atmosphere around the school was calm and conducive to learning. Leaders understand the next steps needed to further improve the quality of teaching and learning, based on what their monitoring tells them about teachers' different strengths and weaknesses. Teachers want to improve, and leaders act swiftly where standards are not good enough or improvements too slow. Staff recruitment can be a challenge, but leaders manage this appropriately, seeking opportunities to 'grow their own'. Training and support from the local authority have strengthened practice in English, mathematics and the humanities, leading to pupils achieving better outcomes in these subjects over time. Where teaching is most effective, work is sufficiently challenging and teachers use questioning well to draw out and deepen pupils' understanding. Where practice is less secure, the purpose of tasks in lessons is not clear, so work does not build securely on pupils' prior learning.

As expectations for pupils' conduct have risen, so have the number of fixed-term exclusions from school. This, alongside significant bouts of illness, has contributed to absence rates which are currently above average and have increased since this time last year. Systems for managing instances of poor behaviour are clear, understood and mostly successful. Detailed records enable leaders to identify and address emerging concerns more quickly than in the past, working with experts from beyond the school to provide extra support for pupils who need it. Where appropriate, leaders explore alternative provision as a way of meeting pupils' needs more effectively. Consequently, exclusions have recently begun to decline again. However, a small number of pupils persist in not behaving as well as they should, particularly in Years 8 and 10. Other pupils rightly find the impact this has on their learning to be frustrating.

At the last inspection, the school was asked to focus specifically on disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Improving provision, attendance and outcomes for these groups of pupils features prominently on the federation improvement plan. Leaders are rightly mindful of 'doing fewer things but doing them well', in order to maximise the impact of their work. They have focused their efforts on three priorities: Year 11, Year 7 and pupils' attendance. A whole-school approach to meeting the needs of pupils with SEND is promoted successfully by leaders' monitoring of provision in class, leading to useful training and support that teachers value. Staff now have a better understanding than in the past of what these pupils need to help them to learn well, and the barriers that impede their attendance and academic achievement. Consequently, teachers have greater ownership over how to support pupils in the classroom and in coming to school regularly. Leaders were able to share some instances of where their actions had led to notable improvements in pupils' attendance and/or academic achievement.

Overall, pupils with SEND make progress that is close to their peers in school but is weaker than for all pupils nationally. Similarly, there are early signs that

disadvantaged pupils are making better progress than in the past, although their outcomes by the end of Year 11 in 2018 remained stubbornly low. In Years 8, 10 and 11, disadvantaged pupils are currently reaching higher standards of attainment than was the case at the same point last year. However, disadvantaged pupils' progress remains behind that of their peers overall. Their attendance, as for the whole school, has declined slightly, remaining below average. Disadvantaged pupils feature disproportionately in the school's exclusion figures, indicating the further and urgent work that is needed to quickly have a greater impact on this area of the school's work.

Following the previous inspection in November 2017, leaders commissioned an external review of governance. Changes to how the governing body operates happened as a result. Governors reflect how this has sharpened their oversight of standards in the school and helped them to provide greater levels of challenge and support to leaders on the school's journey of improvement. This was evident in the records of their meetings and monitoring visits. Governors use time more effectively than before to 'drill down' into what leaders tell them, challenging them where the impact of leaders' work on pupils' outcomes is not evident. However, this does not necessarily lead to the strong improvements needed in some areas of the school, specifically attendance and the progress of pupils in Year 11.

External support

The local authority remains invested in helping Medina College to become a good school. Advisers' ongoing visits to the school contribute helpfully to the development of leadership, teaching and learning, and governance. Local subject network groups provide a useful avenue for school staff and leaders to share best practice from across the island. Local authority officers provide leaders with valuable and accurate feedback about where standards are rising and which elements of provision remain in need of urgent improvement. This ensures that all remain sufficiently focused on the task in hand.

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

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Moles

Her Majesty's Inspector