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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 29 June 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring 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 to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) 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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the 2020-21 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

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

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) attend school regularly and receive teaching that is well matched to their needs
- secure arrangements for governance that provide the expertise and determination to hold leaders fully to account.

Context

During the period that most pupils were learning remotely, teachers taught live lessons available online and following the normal timetable. Leaders provided pupils with a large quantity of information and communication technology equipment to make sure that everyone could learn from home. Teachers adjusted the sequence of topics to take account of the online context. For example, teachers of personal, social and health education postponed those topics that might lead pupils to want to see an adult in person.

Since March, all pupils have been required to attend school, unless they have medical reasons for absence. On the day of the inspection, the normal timetable had been suspended, and pupils were learning about topics relevant to their personal development. 47 pupils were learning at home because they were self-isolating.

Despite everyone's best efforts, some pupils, often those with SEND or who are disadvantaged, lost their commitment to school during the periods of remote learning.

You have consulted with parents over the desire to join a multi-academy trust. Leaders have identified the trust that would best match Oldbury Academy's current strengths and weaknesses. Although the legal process has not been completed, leaders hope the move can take place imminently.

Main findings

Leaders have continued to take well-judged actions to address those areas of the school that require improvement. Improvement plans correctly identify priorities and evaluate where there is further work to do. You recognise the usefulness of more concise plans in communicating key ideas with the wider school community.

Staff are minimising the impact of COVID-19 by providing an environment in which pupils feel safe. For example, the school admits pupils earlier in the mornings so that they can spend informal time with staff if they wish. Pupils told me that the school is fair, and as one said, 'Teachers make you feel a valued member of society'.

There is a strong sense of collaboration and joint purpose. Teachers say that the training they receive has helped them to improve their practice. For example, they feel confident to teach new topics in relationships and sex education. Staff believe their opinions are important. As a result, teachers are enthusiastic contributors to the ongoing development of the curriculum.

You have ensured that all pupils learn a broad range of subjects. Subject leaders understand well the need to base new topics on what pupils already know. They

have identified how work in different subjects can link together so that it makes better sense to pupils. Teachers check on what pupils remember, and adjust the learning accordingly. Pupils with whom I spoke could recall key ideas, and believe that the whole curriculum is contributing well to their needs.

Inspection evidence shows that some pupils with SEND struggle to recall what they have learned. They find it hard to link it in with what they already know. New leaders of the provision for pupils with SEND recognise that there must be a fresh emphasis on improving teaching so that it better helps these pupils to remember new knowledge and ideas. They have asked staff to identify the specific training that will enable them to do this.

You have clear plans to improve pupils' oracy and reading. My conversations during the inspection showed that pupils are used to debate, and some are impressively articulate. The development of pupils' reading, and in particular the reading of those who find it hard, was hit by the pandemic. Leaders should ensure that through the implementation of the agreed approach to teaching reading skills, and the additional support for those who need it, all pupils become competent, confident readers.

The overall rate of attendance reflects your sustained efforts to return the school to normality. Despite this, attendance rates for disadvantaged pupils and for pupils with SEND lag behind those of their peers. The rate of fixed-term exclusions continues to fall.

Governors are deeply committed to the school, and provide a valuable link with the local community. Minutes of meetings show that governors question senior leaders about some aspects of their work. However, little has been done to address the recommendations from previous reports. Inspection evidence shows that governors are too accepting of information provided to them, and lack an independent perspective from which to challenge and hold you and other senior leaders to account. You have long recognised the benefits of joining a multi-academy trust, with one of these being the viewpoints and skills of the trustees and trust officers.

Additional support

The school continues to receive valuable support for curriculum development from leaders in schools that are part of the Stour Vale multi-academy trust. They have met with each subject leader to evaluate the quality of their curriculum design.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and three governors, including the chair, to consider progress since the last inspection. I visited some lessons in which pupils were learning about aspects of their personal development. I discussed the teaching of personal, social and health education, English and science with subject leaders and teachers. I met with groups of pupils

to discuss their experience of school and their learning. I scrutinised the workbooks of some pupils from Year 7 and Year 9. I looked at the school's self-evaluation, current plans, minutes of meetings and other documents.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Spoor
Ofsted Inspector