

Serco Inspections
Colmore Plaza
20 Colmore Circus
Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6AT

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T: 0121 6799163
Direct email: lewis.mackie1@serco.com



9 October 2014

Matthew Gauthier
Headteacher
Samuel Ryder Academy
Drakes Drive
St Albans
AL1 5AR

Dear Mr Gauthier

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Samuel Ryder Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 8 October 2014, 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in April 2014. 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 recent section 5 inspection. The academy should take further action to:

- ensure that it evaluates the impact of planned actions to be confident they are making a difference
- improve the quality of subject leadership.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and other senior leaders, students from Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, the Chair and two other members of the Governing Body, and two representatives of the Sir John Lawes Academies Trust to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the academy action plan. You accompanied me to a number of lessons to observe students' learning in

English, mathematics, science and art and to look at their books. I also looked at the academy's records of recruitment checks on staff.

Context

Since the previous inspection you have increased the number of Heads of Year due to the rising number of students on roll. A new Chair of the Governing Body was appointed in September 2014.

Main findings

Your academy action plan outlines in great detail how you plan to address the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. It is clear who is leading the improvement initiatives and how often you will check to see whether you are on track to achieve your goals throughout the coming year. The plan provides information on how you intend to measure the success of most of your initiatives, but for a few of these how you plan to measure for impact is lacking in precision.

Students join the academy with prior levels of attainment which are below the national average. Your most recent examination results show a marked improvement in the proportion of students achieving 5 or more A* to C grades at GCSE including in English and mathematics. The proportion of students who make expected progress in both English and mathematics is now broadly average. However, students' attainment in some subjects remains well below the 2013 national average, including in product design, dance, geography, history and physical education.

You acknowledge the importance of the role of middle leaders in driving school improvement and have instigated a comprehensive training programme. It is clear that subject leaders are starting to have an impact because standards are rising in English, mathematics and science. However, leadership at this level is inconsistent and more needs to be done to ensure all subject leaders are effective in driving improvements in their areas.

You have rightly raised the profile of boys' achievement in the academy by requiring all subject leaders to identify how they plan to raise boys' attainment in their improvement plans. You also run separate classes in English for boys and girls in Year 11 and this approach is proving to be successful. My scrutiny of the academy's data shows that boys' progress is accelerating in both English and mathematics, and a greater proportion of boys are now making good progress.

You have carried out some interesting and productive work on differentiating between students who are gifted and those who are talented. As well as providing special projects for these students, you ensure that teachers meet their needs better when planning for learning. This was evident from my scrutiny of lesson plans and my observations in the classroom.

You are building up a more accurate profile of the quality of teaching in the academy and its impact on learning by gathering a wider range of information including looking at achievement data, scrutinising students' books and having discussions with students. Consequently, you are in a better position to target appropriate support at those teachers whose teaching is not yet consistently good. My scrutiny of students' books shows that teachers' marking is clearly helping students to understand what they have done well and how they can improve. Most students respond well to their teachers' comments and make better progress because of this.

Members of the governing body are able to identify the strengths of the academy and demonstrate a reasonable understanding of what actions need to be taken to drive improvement. They gain a deeper insight into the work of individual subject areas through their visits to the academy, which are followed up by written reports and points for further action.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

As a member of The Sir John Lawes Academies Trust, Sir John Lawes School has supported the academy well by sharing its expertise, particularly in relation to improving the quality of teaching and ensuring that teachers' assessments of students' progress become more accurate. Sir John Lawes School and your academy have wisely focused on identifying existing talent and on investing in these members of staff to increase capacity and long-term stability.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire, the Sir John Lawes Academies Trust, the Education Funding Agency and the Department for Education - Academies Advisers Unit.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector