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9 October 2014

Ms E Gent
Principal
Banbury Academy
Ruskin Road
Banbury
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Dear Ms Gent

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Banbury Academy

Following my visit to your school on 9 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 school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 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 school should take further action to make sure that:

- action plans specify the changes in practice and the improvements in the progress of different groups of students expected at key points in the year, so you can check the effectiveness of the plans and adjust them if needed
- the local advisory board and the academy trust receive regular reports that show the proportions of disadvantaged students making expected and more than expected progress, so they can see if these students are catching up with their peers quickly enough
- leaders gain a precise understanding of how well the academy tackles racist and any other prejudice bullying.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, the executive director of the academy trust and members of the local advisory board to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I scrutinised documents including the academy's action plans and information about students' progress. We briefly visited lessons around the academy to see teaching and learning.

Context

Since the last inspection you have restructured your senior leadership team. It now consists of a newly appointed associate principal, two vice principals and seven assistant principals, three of whom are new to the academy. You have created two new posts of lead practitioner, one each for English and mathematics and appointed staff to these. Fourteen teachers have joined and 14 have left. A new data manager has joined the academy.

Main findings

You are working well to tackle most of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. A new computer-based data information system helps leaders collect and analyse information about the progress of students more easily. Leaders have developed an improved approach to presenting information about students' achievement in each class to clearly show the progress students make from their individual starting points, including disadvantaged students. This is now ready for use. You are taking a well-considered approach to improve teaching. Work to develop the way teachers assess and mark work, and provide guidance to students to help them improve is comprehensive and thorough. A new policy sets clear suitable expectations for teachers and they have received training and support to help them meet these. Leaders visit lessons and examine students' work to check that teaching is improving. Teachers are told what they are doing well and what they still need to do better. Those who need to, work with a coach to help them. Leaders review the progress of this work so they can adjust their approach as needed. However, you have not considered the area for improvement identified at the previous inspection about dealing consistently and robustly with racist bullying well enough. You do not know if the academy's work to promote an understanding of diversity, and tackle prejudice and bullying is as effective as it needs to be, or if you need to take further action.

The academy action plan is not an effective tool for driving further development. It does not define the improvements needed in teaching and students' progress by key points in the year. Neither does it include targets for closing the gap in progress between disadvantaged students and their peers.

The local advisory board has responded well to the findings of the previous inspection. Governors have made sure that information about students' progress in each class is more clearly presented and easy to understand. They have set tight deadlines for carrying out this improved approach. They use information gathered by the chief executive during his visits to the academy, to corroborate the information you give them about the quality of teaching. They recognise the need to sharpen the academy's action plan so they can hold you to account more effectively.

External support

The Chief Executive of the Aspirations Academy Trust visits the academy weekly to check the quality of teaching and highlight where improvements are needed. He also makes sure that academy staff receive suitable support by bringing in expertise from other academies in the trust when needed. However, he has not made sure the academy action plan clearly addresses all the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. He has also not set clear targets for the progress of different groups of students against which the academy trust can hold you to account.

I am copying this letter to the Chief Executive of the Aspirations Academy Trust, the Chair of the Local Advisory Board, the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire, the Education Funding Agency and the Academies Advisors Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Diana Choulerton
Her Majesty's Inspector