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Roger Punton
Principal
ARK Kings Academy
Shannon Road
Kings Norton
Birmingham
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Dear Mr Punton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to ARK Kings Academy

Following my visit to your school on 12 January 2015, 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 September 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:

- refine the academy improvement plan so that targets and actions for raising the achievement of different groups of students, including disadvantaged students, are explicitly stated
- ensure that the improvement plan includes measurable success criteria and milestones against which progress towards these goals can be checked
- evaluate the information about the achievement of student groups, including that of disadvantaged students more rigorously
- continue to embed initiatives to improve students' writing and teachers' marking and ensure that all teachers insist on high standards of presentation from students.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the principal, senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and one other governor to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I spoke by telephone to the Director of Education Support for ARK Schools, the academy sponsor. The academy improvement plan was evaluated. I undertook brief visits to a number of lessons accompanied by academy leaders and looked at examples of students' work. A range of the academy's documents and records were also examined.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the senior leadership team has been restructured to align their roles and responsibilities more directly to the academy's areas for improvement.

Main findings

The principal, governors, academy sponsor and leaders are ambitious for the academy to become a good school. They have responded quickly to the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection.

The academy improvement plan has been rewritten so that it focuses on the areas for improvement raised in the previous inspection. Some success criteria need to be refined so that they are measurable, and milestones offered in order that leaders can be sure that they are on track to be successful in their actions. The plan also needs to state more clearly how the academy will tackle the weaker achievement of some groups of students, including that of disadvantaged students, girls, the most-able and those students for whom English is an additional language.

Leadership at all levels is being developed. The roles and responsibilities of senior leaders have been reallocated so that they are more clearly accountable for areas of the academy's improvement. Senior leaders provide increased support to middle leaders. Regular meetings ensure that middle leaders focus more directly on what they need to do to make a difference to students' achievement. A number of senior and middle leaders are now undertaking training on accredited courses. The support of ARK network leads and other training opportunities from within the ARK network has further strengthened the skills of subject leaders.

Recent training for teachers has focused on the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. The impact of this training was seen in a number of classrooms in which teachers were using 'exit passes' to assess the understanding of students at the end of lessons, to inform planning for the next lesson. Senior leaders check the quality of teaching systematically and rigorously so that they can identify areas of good practice, gauge the impact of training and establish the next steps to take. The academy's records show that some teaching is improving as a result, but too much

teaching still requires improvement. Increasingly, subject leaders are playing a role in checking the work of their teams, for example through regular work scrutiny and lesson walk-throughs, but these procedures need embedding.

Standards of marking are beginning to be more consistent. Best practice in the academy has been shared and is increasingly adopted. More, but not yet all, teachers check that students follow-up and act on the comments that are made on their work. Some teachers do not ensure that all students present their work well.

Students are producing extended writing more regularly than they have done in the past. Leaders have introduced a system so that teachers can assess and track how well students' writing skills are developing. Teachers now need further training in order to understand how they can better help students to make progress in these skills.

The academy's records suggest that the achievement of current Year 11 students is set to improve on the gains made in GCSE results in the previous academic year. These records also show the positive impact of actions taken to raise achievement in some subjects where achievement has been significantly below average in the past. However, at Key Stage 3, progress is still too slow for some year groups in English and mathematics.

Leaders do not always analyse and evaluate the achievement of groups of students well enough. For example, there is not enough focus on tracking the progress of disadvantaged students in English and mathematics in relation to other students in the academy and nationally. This means it is difficult for leaders to be sure that the gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged students and others are closing.

The academy's records show that behaviour is improving in lessons and there is a strong focus on developing better attitudes to learning. In the lessons visited, the majority of students were focused on their work. However, some students still present negative behaviours, such as calling out to the teacher, or struggle to stay on-task without the support of their teacher. Although leaders are taking actions to raise attendance and reduce exclusions, attendance, while better than last year, still requires improvement and exclusions remain too high.

Governors ask probing questions so that they can be sure that the academy is improving. The Chair of the Governing Body and principal attended Ofsted's 'Getting to Good' seminar on 12 December 2014 and this has resulted in a better awareness of the actions that the academy can take to become a good school. Governors now sit on attendance panels so that they are more directly involved in monitoring and supporting this area for improvement. As yet, the appointment of a parent governor has not been successful.

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

External support

The academy sponsors, ARK, provide strong challenge and support for the academy. Two monitoring visits by the academy sponsors have taken place since the previous inspection. The sponsor holds regular meetings with academy leaders to ensure that improvement plans are having an impact. Expertise from within the ARK network has provided effective support for the principal and other leaders, and delivered training to teachers to address improvement priorities.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham local authority and as below.

Yours sincerely

Chris Chapman

Associate Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- For academies [CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk]