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18 June 2015

Mrs Tanya Utton
The Headteacher
Ursuline College
225 Canterbury Road
Westgate-on-Sea
CT8 8LX

Dear Mrs Utton

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Ursuline College

Following my visit to your academy on 17 June 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and the time you took to discuss behaviour in your school.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with the no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about behaviour at the academy.

Evidence

I considered evidence including:

- observations of students' behaviour and their attitudes to learning in lessons
- observations of students' behaviour throughout the day, including discussion with pupils
- documentary evidence
- discussions with school leaders and staff.

Having evaluated all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

leaders and managers have taken effective action to maintain the high standards of behaviour and attitudes identified at the predecessor school's previous inspection.

Context

This is a small secondary school, which has a sixth form. There are 749 students on roll. It has recently converted to academy status within the Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership. Most of its students are White British. A smaller proportion of students than the national average is entitled to free school meals. Similarly, fewer students than average speak English as an additional language. The school generally has a stable student population.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students feel well cared for and safe. One student summed this up when saying of the academy and its staff, 'It's great. They're kind and fair and they sort things out.' Students enjoy much freedom whilst on site, including that they can express their views, even if critical, positively and constructively. They usually feel confident to approach staff. This openness is a great strength of the academy. The site is complex, and there are places where misbehaviour could thrive but, in fact, students generally know the boundaries and respect them. Students behave with care and courtesy. They arrive in the morning and leave at the end of the day in a happy and orderly way, enjoying each other's company. Although members of staff supervise appropriately, and give suitable reminders about uniform standards, for example, the students are generally self-disciplined. They are friendly and polite.

The school day gets off to a positive start with tutorial periods. These are varied in format and respected by the students. In lessons too, students behave well for the most part. Generally, students are attentive to their teachers and supportive of their classmates. However, in some lessons, when the teaching is less engaging to them, their behaviour can deteriorate. As the students themselves said, if they become bored, they lose focus and start to doodle, reduce their concentration or chat unnecessarily. On rare occasions, I noted teachers talking over the students without expecting them to be quiet and I heard a very small number of students calling out in class, to the detriment of the lessons.

Students say that there is occasional bullying but that this is well dealt with. The school keeps detailed records of all forms of bullying, including any racial and homophobic incidents, analysing these helpfully to check for any patterns. Students and staff are aware of some cyber bullying, especially in cases where the perpetrators can remain anonymous. The school deals with this proactively. It draws on useful external support to guide and support students in making the best choices, in matters relating to drugs and sex education for example. The school's work to involve parents in sorting out any problems is improving. However, some parents still feel that they could be given more help. Any incidents of serious misbehaviour are thoroughly investigated. The students with whom I met agreed that such investigations were fair. They felt too, however, that sometimes students who are accused of misbehaviour by others have to work harder than they should to prove their innocence or to believe that staff understand that there may be two sides to the story.

I met with several students, formally and informally. They were able to provide many examples of how school staff have worked with them to improve their behaviour, or help them overcome any particular difficulties. The school's recently reorganised 'Insieme' inclusion centre is particularly impressive in this respect. The staff employed there are very clear about their specific roles and work together well. They make good use of the academy's well-organised communication and record systems to get the information they need about the students they are supporting and to provide reports to key colleagues, such as heads of house. They are supported and held to account effectively by leaders using carefully targeted systems for managing their performance. The numbers of students needing to be taken out of normal lessons for short periods has reduced considerably in the last few months. The academy, nevertheless, has a high rate of temporary exclusions. This is reducing and the students concerned are usually reintegrated into school positively. The headteacher rightly recognises the desirability of reducing the use of exclusion further.

The academy is making many well-considered improvements to its systems and policies for managing students' behaviour and ensuring their well-being. Central to this are the academy's Christian foundation and concepts of forgiveness and encouragement. Governors play a key role, alongside the headteacher and senior staff, in promoting these. Currently, however, the behaviour policy available on the academy website is outdated and does not reflect the positive changes in practice.

The rate of attendance is about in line with the national average and is improving. Instances of persistent absence have decreased notably. There is very little difference in absence rates amongst different groups, such as boys and girls, or students entitled to the support of pupil premium funding and their classmates. This is indicative of the academy's success in achieving its aim of being inclusive and supportive to all.

Priorities for further improvement

- Reduce inattentive behaviour in lessons by ensuring that teaching is consistently engaging for all students.
- Ensure the academy's improving practice in managing students' behaviour is reflected in up-to-date policy statements.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Kent, to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Education Funding Agency and the Archdiocese of Southwark.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector