

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



16 November 2015

Mr Christopher Terry
Principal
Witchford Village College
Manor Road
Witchford
Ely
CB6 2JA

Dear Mr Terry

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Witchford Village College

Following my visit to your school on 5 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The visit incorporated a particular focus on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school. In order to become a good school further action should be taken to:

- set sharper targets so that the impact of the wide range of extra support pupils, particularly the disadvantaged, receive is fully understood
- use the new processes developed for analysing the progress and attainment of different groups of pupil in every subject and year group to ensure that all leaders and governors know where resources, support and challenge are most needed, so improving achievement is sustained.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other leaders, the Chair and

vice-chair of the Governing Body and a group of pupils. I visited some classes with one of the vice-principals, we looked at pupils' work and talked to them about their learning. I also spoke on the phone to your independent school improvement partner and to a local authority adviser responsible for the education support provided for children in local authority care.

I scrutinised leaders' evaluation of the academy's work, improvement planning, assessment information, analysis of pupils' attendance and of the pastoral support provided for pupils.

Context

There have been no major changes in staffing since my last visit. The number of admissions has increased by almost a quarter since September 2013. The proportion of pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium (extra government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and in local authority care) has increased by about a third, but it remains below the national average.

Main findings

Leaders' actions to improve the outcomes achieved by pupils have successfully raised the proportion of pupils achieving 5 GCSE qualifications at grade A*– C, including in English and mathematics. Although it remains below the national average, it is much closer to it than it was in 2014. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving this standard has increased significantly. Work has also been successful in narrowing the gap between the outcomes achieved by disadvantaged pupils and by their peers. There is still more to be done to ensure that all pupils achieve equally well, particularly because too few disadvantaged pupils make expected progress in either English or mathematics.

The systems in place to analyse how well each year group is achieving in different subjects have been developed well and now give a simple but comprehensive overview of how well each group of pupils is doing. Because this information is new, its full potential to help governors and middle leaders understand and challenge achievement in all year groups has not been fully realised.

Senior leaders have improved and sharpened the systems in place to assess and monitor the progress of each individual pupil, including of those who are identified as disadvantaged. These processes are effectively used to identify when pupils do not understand particular aspects of the work they are studying. Short-term additional support is then provided out of regular school hours, to enable them to catch up on the gaps in their learning. The vice-principal monitoring this work is doing so very rigorously and some pupils spoken to in lessons were clear about the changes. They said they knew why extra work had been planned for them and which aspects of their work they needed to improve. They also said that the short-term, very focused nature of the support made it manageable for them. Additional support

provided for pupils needing to catch up by learning mentors is also proving to be effective in developing their engagement and confidence.

The work of the progress leaders, who have replaced heads of year, is sharply focused because they analyse the progress, attendance and behaviour of pupils in the year groups they are responsible for. This means that the factors contributing to a pupil's underachievement are better understood and can be quickly addressed. In some instances, where issues are identified with a particular subject or teacher, there is not enough clarity about who should be addressing the priorities, so actions are not taken as quickly.

Leaders' drive to improve teaching in order to achieve excellence for all is strong. They have taken direct action to challenge departments where the 2015 outcomes were not high enough and have included specific expectations for different subjects in the guidance they use to monitor teaching. Teaching staff and teaching assistants are using more finely tuned approaches to assessing pupils' work; this is increasing their expectations of how much pupils can achieve and raising the profile of pupils who are well positioned to be able to improve their performance to the next level. Pupils' work shows they make progress as a result. They were able to demonstrate how their teachers' marking helped them build an understanding of their learning strengths and of the aspects of their work they need to improve. In some of the teaching seen during my visit, it was evident that disadvantaged pupils' needs were understood well and that this finely tuned approach, coupled often with well-planned additional pastoral and family support, is the reason they are achieving higher standards.

The impact of the extra support and care pupils receive is not well enough understood because it is not measured or reported against agreed expectations for its success. Improvements over time in, for example, pupils' attendance and behaviour are not made clear enough. The pastoral support team do ensure that pupils have access to a wide range of support and services. Decisions have been made to employ staff, for example the family support adviser, where local services are reducing. As a result, pupils vulnerable to underachievement receive well-coordinated help. Individual pupils' needs are well understood; their behaviour is tracked and monitored carefully. Records show that staff are given advice to help them improve behaviour, where it is not effectively managed.

A young carer spoke about how much the young carers group is enabling pupils, who help care for their parents, to understand how to manage the challenges this presents them with. Provision for children who are in the care of the local authority meets their needs well because leaders make sure they understand their circumstances fully and engage strongly with the agencies who provide for them.

Governors do not have a sufficiently detailed knowledge of pupils' achievement, particularly of how well different groups of pupils, including those supported by the pupil premium, are progressing in the range of subjects taught to year groups across

the academy. This means they cannot sufficiently challenge leaders about how well different groups of pupils are attending and achieving or evaluate whether the pupil premium funding is used well enough. Their work is, however, developing. Governor roles in monitoring the impact of actions in the improvement plan are clearly identified and there is evidence that they are starting to ask more challenging questions. For example, in relation to the need to improve standards in science, the link governor has requested the opportunity to observe a departmental meeting where pupil progress is reviewed and to discuss the impact of the after-school catch-up sessions.

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

External support

Leaders have continued to use the pertinent advice of an independent external consultant to support the academy's development and to validate their work and self-evaluation. A plan to develop teaching and learning has been developed through work with a national leader of education and Bottisham and Sawston Village Colleges. Leaders are drawing carefully on the expertise of other academy leaders as they visit each other's schools to review specific aspects of development, secure assessment and improve middle leadership.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Department for Education and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Prue Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector