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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Daniel Hatley
Principal
Ark William Parker Academy
Parkstone Road
Hastings
TN34 2NT

Dear Mr Hatley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ark William Parker Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 7 March 2016, 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 July 2015. 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 in order to become good. The academy should take further action to:

- establish a clear vision for the academy's future and its particular place in the education provision in Hastings
- ensure that improvement work ranges widely.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and the vice principals to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also held meetings and discussions with other leaders, a representative of the ARK academy chain and local governors. With you and your vice principal, I visited some lessons, speaking with pupils and looking at their work. I evaluated key documents, including the academy improvement plan and self-evaluations, records of ARK monitoring visits and governing body documents.

Context

The academy's staffing has been unstable since the inspection in July 2015. Many lessons and classes have been covered by temporary staff. This situation is being recovered and most vacancies are now filled.

The sixth form, shared with the nearby girls' academy, is now fully based on the William Parker site.

You are leaving the school at the end of this term to move on to a headship elsewhere. One of the vice principals is to take over as acting principal.

Main findings

Since the inspection, you have worked hard to bring improvements in key areas of the academy's life. These include teaching, behaviour management, staff performance management and the specialist work within individual subjects. This work is successful and the school is improving. Staff have higher aspirations for the pupils. Teaching is improving. In 2015, GCSE results were notably better, with about half of pupils gaining five good GCSEs including English and mathematics. This is in line with the national average for boys. Almost all pupils left Year 11 with at least five GCSE grades. On the other hand, many pupils achieved C grades, without pushing on to get A or B grades. They did not all make the progress they should have done. The gap between the performance of disadvantaged pupils entitled to support through the pupil premium funding and all pupils nationally narrowed but remains too wide.

The academy maintains clear and accurate records of pupils' current progress. You reasonably expect that there will be some further improvement in GCSE results this year. You also note that pupils in Years 7 to 9 are making better progress than has been the case in the past. Teaching and results in the sixth form, which is a joint provision with the nearby girls' academy, also show clear improvement. When we toured the academy together, we saw some sixth formers whose achievement was very high: in art, for example. This is all positive but you are aware that there remains much more to do. The school still has some way to go before it meets the criteria as a good school.

When we toured the academy together, we saw much evidence of improved teaching since the previous inspection. You have energetically recruited permanent staff to reduce considerably the number of vacancies. The quality of teaching nevertheless remains inconsistent. We saw some teaching that was very clear and engaged pupils fully. In some other lessons, however, pupils appeared to lose some interest and concentration as the teaching was less engaging and challenging. In these cases, their behaviour deteriorated. Some of the teaching, as you described it,

'lacked energy'. The quality of the pupils' work we saw was also mixed. However, pupils were generally keen to talk about their work and learning and took pride in it.

The current position of the academy, then, is clearly improving but with much more still to sort out. At this stage, it is necessary to do some things differently. Until now, you have led and introduced a number of different improvement strategies, which have been successful. Middle leaders, such as subject leaders, have worked usefully alongside senior leaders to make some necessary and valuable changes, shown in the clearly worded and systematic academy development plan.

However, these individual improvements are not yet part of a fully coherent vision of what this academy can become. The improvements are all useful but limited. They tend to focus on English and mathematics more than the other subjects and aspects of school life. This needs to change. You are clearly aware that your pupils' motivation and their learning depend very much on the full range of subjects. The wonderful sports facilities are not currently used as much or as well as they could be. More could be done to develop some existing strengths in the arts. Higher outcomes for all pupils could be expected. The academy's Christian ethos could be developed usefully. The place of the joint sixth form alongside other local post-16 provision could be better defined.

I had many discussions with senior staff, the academy chain and governors about these matters and the importance of being increasingly precise about what the academy is aiming towards. Then, individual pieces of improvement work can naturally form part of that coherent big picture. All agree with this. The local governing body sees the need to increase the joined-up working, as does Ark. The incoming acting principal is also committed to developing a clearer overall vision.

External support

Ark supports the school closely. Its staff are rightly ambitious for William Parker. It has introduced better structures, and much greater determination, to bring improvement. Working with the local governing body, it holds senior staff to account effectively and monitors the academy's development carefully. It knows that there is much to do yet for the academy to become good.

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

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Diocese of Chichester, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for East Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector