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Miss Fiona Seddon
Principal
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Dear Miss Seddon

Short inspection of The Milton Keynes Academy

Following my visit to the school on 10 October 2017 with Sharon Cromie, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in April 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since arriving in September 2016, you have sharpened teaching and learning practices for all staff. You have shared your vision of what makes great teaching and effective feedback to your staff. They now have a much clearer understanding of how to plan and check that pupils are making progress in their lessons. We saw how some pupils were using teachers' feedback to reinforce their knowledge and understanding in some lessons.

Your calm, organised and open approach has been welcomed by school leaders. You have built strong relationships with staff and governors so that you have a cohesive team ready to take on new initiatives to support your pupils. You have identified clearly why further improvements need to be made and how these are going to have an impact on pupils' outcomes.

You began this school year insisting that all pupils wore their school uniform well, brought the right equipment to school and did not use their mobile phones in school. Pupils now arrive well dressed, with the right equipment and are not distracted by mobile phones in lessons. Pupils generally behave well in lessons and follow instructions when asked. You are currently refining the school day so that lunchtime does not adversely affect other pupils' learning.

Leaders are determined to improve the life chances of the pupils in your school, especially the disadvantaged pupils. Leaders are committed to raise aspirations and use local business links to inspire and support pupils. Business Link leaders provide pupils with mentors and give inspirational talks to pupils. These strong role models, combined with effective careers advice, mean pupils have clear routes to employment, education or training when they leave school.

You and your team have a belief that 'everyone achieves', and your tutor activities cultivate this motto, encouraging all pupils to engage in their learning and succeed. Pupils' personal and social education programmes focus on developing a can-do approach, building self-esteem and confidence for all.

At the last inspection, inspectors identified the need to improve the consistency and quality of teaching by ensuring that pupils followed the advice offered to improve their progress. In addition, inspectors asked leaders to focus on improving the progress pupils make in mathematics so that it matches the progress made in English.

Leaders have taken, and continue to take, effective action to address these recommendations. There is a renewed focus on teaching and learning. Continual professional training ensures that departments plan learning activities collectively in order to develop different groups of pupils' knowledge and understanding. As a result, most pupils understand and can explain what they are learning because their teachers share with them the key objectives and success criteria of the lesson, in line with school policy.

You have recently introduced a new marking and assessment policy. Most teachers are using this well, although you recognise that it is not yet consistently used by all teachers. In mathematics, some pupils do not keep a record of their learning activities and their teachers are not checking on the progress they make in lessons. This makes it difficult for pupils to reflect on their learning and learn from their mistakes.

Many of your pupils join Milton Keynes Academy with levels of literacy and numeracy that are typically low for their age. Your intervention programme is having a positive effect on pupils' ability to read, communicate and use mathematics. Current information indicates that these pupils are meeting their school targets in English and mathematics by the end of Year 7 as a result of this additional support.

In 2016, the overall progress of pupils at the end of key stage 4 was in line with national averages. Science attainment and progress were particularly strong. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, made similar progress in mathematics to those nationally. However, pupils with low prior attainment made weak progress in English, achieving outcomes below national averages. Some pupils studying geography, history and creative arts made less progress in these subjects than other subjects.

Provisional information on the progress of pupils at key stage 4 in 2017, including disadvantaged pupils, indicates that they made stronger progress in English and mathematics. Pupils with low prior attainment on entry are now making expected progress in most curriculum areas. However, the most able are making less progress than in previous years. This is notable in some subjects like geography, creative arts and physical education. Consequently, pupils' progress overall has declined slightly.

A few pupils with very complex needs are supported by the Bridge Academy. This school provides support for vulnerable pupils with social and emotional issues, as well as those with behaviour difficulties.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders place safeguarding at the heart of their practice in school. They have recognised that some pupils face difficult issues outside of school. These issues often affect their attendance, ability to communicate and confidence. Recent investment in tracking and monitoring systems ensures that your specifically trained safeguarding team can follow up quickly and efficiently on specific concerns. This is also providing the team with essential information which, if relevant, they can share with social services. Your team is using its findings to revisit whole-school personal and social education topics. For example, a recent key stage 4 sex and relationship education day also included topics relating to consent, the dangers attached to sexting and how to recognise child exploitation.

Changes to local health provision have raised the threshold so there is less support available for pupils with mental health issues. You are trying to accommodate these changes by training staff, so they can recognise and support pupils with mental health concerns. Pupils are also being taught how to improve their resilience and this is having a positive effect on their well-being.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff receive safeguarding training periodically throughout the year. Plans are in place to routinely check their understanding so that they can be even more effective in raising any concerns. Governors regularly check that all processes and policies meet requirements and that school records are thorough and complete.

Pupils are taught how to stay safe and feel safe at school. The vast majority of parents agree that their children are well cared for and safe at school. Pupils say that bullying is rare; however, it is dealt with effectively should it occur. They are confident about who to go to if they have a concern.

Inspection findings

- During this inspection we looked closely at specific aspects of the school's provision, including: the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, attendance, exclusions, the quality of learning in English, and sixth form provision.

- You rightly identified that the attendance of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, needs to be further improved. You have made this a whole-school focus since September 2017. Your assistant pastoral leaders are now working more closely with key groups of pupils to improve their individual attendance. Every assembly focuses on rewarding those who attend regularly and your attendance officer checks daily why pupils are not in school. You have made building relationships with parents and guardians of pupils a key priority for your school team so that you can tackle specific issues, such as, for example, mental health issues. This is beginning to improve the attendance of the pupils for this academic year.
- In 2015 and 2016 there were too many exclusions. You identified the need to use an internal exclusion area to improve the behaviour of some pupils. This is having a positive impact on the behaviour of some pupils, and they are now suitably reintegrated back into lessons. Leaders have also identified which pupils are repeat offenders and they have created bespoke programmes of support to improve some pupils' behaviour. This is improving some pupils' behaviour and they are now engaging more positively in their learning.
- You rightly identified that the teaching of English across the school is key to improving the outcomes in other subjects. Your effective subject leader is ensuring the consistent application of the school's teaching, learning and assessment policy. In the lessons we visited, teachers used a range of techniques to check on the progress pupils make, including effective questioning and useful feedback. We saw how pupils who were disadvantaged made similar progress to other pupils. Your English team works well together to plan strong lessons, analyse outcomes, and share good practice. This consistent approach has improved the progress of pupils and disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, in 2017.
- Leaders identified that the sixth form was too small. Students were not staying on to study because the quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form needed to be improved and outcomes were not as strong as they could be. Since September 2016, your sixth-form leader has appropriately challenged how teachers plan and prepare for post-16 lessons. He has used regular professional development to help teachers understand how students learn and how they use feedback to improve their understanding. This has had a positive effect on the outcomes of students in 2017 and more are securing places at universities. Students' attendance has also improved as a result of stronger teaching.
- You have rightly raised the profile of the sixth form with pupils in key stage 4. You have tailored the curriculum to provide an appropriate offer for your pupils. Sixth-form numbers are growing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- attendance improves for all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities

- school improvement continues to focus on improving the consistency of teaching and learning across all subjects so that:
 - teachers’ planning and teaching challenges pupils appropriately, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - staff implement effectively the school’s agreed policy on teaching and learning to accelerate the progress of pupils, particularly in art, history and geography
 - pupils use their learning activities in mathematics to further develop their knowledge and understanding.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children’s services for Milton Keynes. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Walshe
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you, your leadership team, chair of the governing body and middle leaders. We met with pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, both formally and informally, to discuss their views of the school. Inspectors visited a variety of lessons with you and your senior team, including in the sixth form. We examined a range of documentation, including leaders’ evaluation of the school’s effectiveness, governors’ minutes, information about current pupils’ progress, including sixth-form students, as well as pupils’ attendance and behaviour records. Inspectors considered 69 responses to Ofsted’s online survey, Parent View, 25 responses to Ofsted’s staff survey, and 25 responses to Ofsted’s pupil survey.