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9 March 2016

Victoria Bishop
Executive Principal
Sir Christopher Hatton Academy
The Pyghtle
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Northamptonshire
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Dear Mrs Bishop

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Sir Christopher Hatton Academy

Following my visit with Ellenor Beighton, Ofsted Inspector, to your academy on 02 March 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about outcomes for pupils at the academy.

Evidence

Inspectors considered documents relating to the quality of teaching, attendance and pupils' outcomes, including the academy's own self-evaluation of its provision. Inspectors scrutinised the single central record of recruitment checks and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection. Inspectors met with the executive principal and the associate principal, and senior leaders with responsibility for safeguarding, achievement, the sixth form and pupil premium. Pupil premium is additional government funding provided for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and those children who are looked after by the local authority. Inspectors also met with subject leaders for English and mathematics, a group of teachers, groups of pupils from across all years in Key Stages 3 and 4, and members of the multi-academy trust's board of directors and the academy's local governing body, the Sir Christopher Hatton Academy Committee. The lead inspector spoke with a representative from the local authority. Inspectors also spoke with pupils informally during breaktime, when they also observed pupils' behaviour.

Inspectors observed eight lessons, two of which were joint lesson observations involving the lead inspector and the associate principal.

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

Pupils' achievement continues to be strong at the academy.

Context

Sir Christopher Hatton Academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school, but with a sixth form that is below average in size. It is the lead academy in a multi-academy trust. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above the national average, while the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is average. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is slightly below average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is below average. However, the proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan is above average. The proportion of pupils who arrive or leave the academy part way through the academic year is average.

Main findings

Senior leaders, led strongly by the executive principal, have high expectations of both the pupils and the staff at the academy. Leaders regularly review the academy's provision to ensure that it enables pupils to meet their aspirational targets. Regular and robust systems for checking the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes provide leaders with a clear view of the academy's strengths and areas for improvement. Where senior leaders identify any performance that does not meet their high expectations, they take swift action to secure improvement. Consequently, teaching is effective and a higher proportion than seen nationally make more than the progress expected across all subjects.

The executive principal has developed an inclusive culture of strong leadership that focuses clearly on ensuring that staff in leadership roles are highly effective in fulfilling their responsibilities. For example, several senior leaders are taking advantage of professional development to sharpen their leadership skills still further. Middle leaders who are relatively new to role receive effective guidance from more experienced leaders to ensure that they are secure in their leadership role. The executive principal has also been astute in identifying potential leadership talent within her staff in order to prepare them for future leadership roles. Consequently, the capacity to build further upon the work of current senior leaders is strong.

Leaders at all levels regularly check the quality of teaching. They do this through formal lesson observations and short visits to a number of classes, as well as by checking the quality of pupils' work and speaking with pupils. Consequently, leaders have a precise view of the strengths and areas for improvement relating to the quality of teaching. They use this to ensure that teachers receive appropriate training to improve their teaching. For example, teachers receive the opportunity to observe each other's practice in order to sharpen their own skills. Senior leaders

have also identified teachers whose practice is exceptional. Teachers are able to work with these colleagues to observe and learn from their excellent practice. Consequently, the academy has in place effective systems to ensure that all teaching is as good as the best.

The academy has rigorous systems in place for checking on the progress pupils are making. Subject leaders work closely with senior leaders to ensure that the performance information that teachers provide, is accurate. Subject leaders regularly scrutinise this information in order to identify those pupils who may be falling behind and provide support to help them catch up. Subject leaders regularly review this support to ensure that it is effective. Consequently, the proportion of pupils who make more than the progress expected is above national expectations. The pupils who inspectors met were very appreciative of the support that they receive.

Senior leaders have been diligent in identifying possible barriers to learning that may prevent pupils from making rapid progress. They have been astute in recognising that pupils' literacy skills need to be improved. Because of this, there has been an effective drive within the academy to engage pupils with reading. All pupils undertake a period of reading every day to ensure that they develop their reading skills. Senior leaders have designed these sessions in such a way as to ensure that pupils have many opportunities to read across the full range of their subjects. Senior leaders closely measure the impact of this strategy. Performance information indicates that current pupils across all years make rapid progress in their reading skills.

Senior leaders have also ensured that those pupils who arrive at the academy in Year 7 with weak literacy and numeracy skills receive effective support. Senior leaders closely monitor the effectiveness of this support and adapt as necessary. For example, a literacy support initiative that took place before the school day last year now takes place during the school day to ensure that more pupils attend. Performance information indicates that those Year 7 pupils who are eligible for this support make rapid progress, particularly in developing their communication skills. Pupils who do not make rapid enough progress receive further support until they have made the necessary improvement.

In 2015, there was a decline in the proportion of pupils achieving good-quality GCSEs, including English and mathematics. This was due to the academy's policy of entering pupils early for these examinations. Senior leaders and governors, in agreement with parents, previously adopted this policy to ensure pupils in Years 10 and 11 received opportunities to improve their GCSE grades. After reviewing the situation, senior leaders have decided to cease this practice as it no longer serves the pupils' best interests. Information on pupils in Years 10 and 11 indicates that a higher proportion of pupils are likely to achieve above national expectations in their GCSE subjects, particularly in English, mathematics and science. The proportion of most-able pupils who are on track and who are likely to achieve the highest grades has also increased. For example, the proportion of most-able pupils in Year 11 who are on track to make rapid progress in English and mathematics is high, and is

above those levels achieved nationally in 2015. The outcomes for current pupils in Key Stage 3 further reflect the high levels of progress that pupils make at the academy.

The academy closely monitors the attendance, behaviour and progress of disadvantaged pupils. Senior leaders have recognised that the absence and exclusions of disadvantaged pupils have been too high in previous years. Consequently, they have increased the support that these pupils receive to ensure that they attend more regularly and behave appropriately. For example, leaders undertake home visits where necessary to encourage pupils to attend more regularly. These strategies have seen a reduction in the proportions of disadvantaged pupils who are absent from school or who are excluded.

Senior leaders ensure that the academy uses the pupil premium effectively to support disadvantaged pupils' progress. Senior leaders regularly review the impact of any strategies that they put into place, and do not continue with any that they identify as being ineffective. The academy's performance information indicates that disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 are achieving well across their GCSE subjects. Furthermore, the gaps between disadvantaged pupils within the academy and other pupils nationally are closing rapidly, particularly in English and mathematics at Key Stages 3 and 4.

Those pupils who inspectors met spoke highly of the good relationships they have with their teachers. In lessons, inspectors observed positive relationships between teachers and pupils. Teachers possess good subject knowledge, set activities that engage with pupils' interest and ask probing questions in order to develop pupils' thinking. For example, in a Year 8 English lesson, the teacher encouraged pupils to consider the language that Lady Macbeth used to encourage Macbeth to kill King Duncan. Teachers also provide appropriate support where pupils are experiencing difficulties. For example, in a Year 10 mathematics lesson, pupils completed a set of questions that enabled them to practise their mathematical skills. The teacher then proceeded to assess the pupils' understanding of these skills and clarified misconceptions where they arose. Consequently, pupils were able to become more secure in those areas where they had identified for themselves that they were less strong. In a few lessons, inspectors observed some pupils who were not fully engaged in their learning. However, due to teachers deploying effective strategies, these pupils were soon re-engaged with their learning.

The provision for learners in the sixth form remains strong. Senior leaders have reviewed the advice and guidance that pupils receive in applying for a place at the sixth form, to ensure that they embark upon the correct courses. Prior to starting their sixth form courses and during the first few weeks of Year 12, teachers work closely with learners to ensure that they develop the study skills necessary to be successful in their chosen courses. The head of sixth form closely checks learners' progress and ensures that those who are falling behind receive appropriate support to enable them to catch up. Form tutors also closely monitor the progress of their learners and provide mentoring where it is necessary. Because of these strategies, outcomes in sixth form at both A level and AS level continue to rise, while the

proportion of learners who successfully move from Year 12 to Year 13 has increased. Most learners in Year 12 last year successfully moved into Year 13 this year.

Learners in the sixth form receive effective advice and guidance relating to the next steps after Year 13. For example, the head of sixth form has introduced the 'Brilliant Club'. This club uses current university students to encourage those learners from families that do not have a history of higher education to make applications to study at university. Because of this effective advice and guidance, most learners progress to higher education study at university. In 2015, all learners successfully moved into some form of education, employment or training.

There are clear lines of communication between senior leaders and governors that provide governors with a precise view of the academy's strengths and its areas for improvement. For example, governors receive regular presentations concerning different aspects of the academy's provision from senior, subject or pastoral leaders. Governors challenge leaders to ensure that the academy's provision is of the highest level, and receive reports from senior leaders of the impact of actions that the academy has undertaken to improve provision further.

External support

Senior leaders have worked effectively with external providers to ensure that their judgements of the quality of the academy's provision are secure. Senior leaders have engaged with external organisations to review the academy's provision where they have identified practice that is not to the standard that they expect. For example, senior leaders have previously arranged for an external review of the provision in art and for the provision of pupils who have special educational needs or disability. Senior leaders have responded swiftly to the recommendations they have received from these reviews. Furthermore, they have appropriately used these recommendations in their strategic planning for the development of the academy.

Senior leaders provide support to those primary academies from within the multi-academy trust. This support has enabled the senior leaders to improve the provision the pupils receive from these primary academies. Consequently, these pupils arrive at Sir Christopher Hatton Academy with improved understanding and skills to be able to make more rapid progress in the academy.

As a national support school, the academy also provides support to several other local schools at the request of the local authority.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that leaders and teachers implement effective strategies to eradicate the very few incidents of off-task behaviour.
- Ensure that all policies fully reflect the high level of effective practice that is taking place at the academy.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hollingsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector