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13 December 2016

Mrs Beverley Williams
CEO, Legra Academy Trust
Belfairs Academy
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Dear Mrs Williams

Short inspection of Belfairs Academy

Following my visit to the school on 24 November 2016 with Russell Ayling, 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 May 2013.

This school continues to be good.

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

You lead the school with passion, clarity of mission and a vision to improve the lives of all your pupils. Your leadership and that of your team is successfully establishing a culture of excellence. The improvements that you have made since your arrival are now seen in the positive achievement of current pupils. You, your leaders and your staff demonstrate a commitment to high expectations and for most pupils this is demonstrated in their examination results.

You demonstrated to us that you know your school well and have an accurate picture of where your strengths and weaknesses lie. You have taken and continue to take effective action to address the relative weaknesses you have found. You had pre-empted all the issues we identified from our pre-inspection analysis of the available information. The frustration for you is that the improved outcomes in some areas are only now beginning to appear. For example, historic performance information over time shows disadvantaged pupils consistently doing well in English compared to all pupils nationally with similar starting points, but less well than their peers in mathematics. Your internal monitoring suggests that this will no longer be the case with the current Year 11 because of the actions you are taking.

In the past students in the sixth form were not making the progress that they should. Major changes to provision in the sixth form are now being reflected in

outcomes for learners. At the previous inspection, the sixth form was judged to be less effective than the rest of the school. A short inspection does not provide enough evidence to change judgements, but we found no evidence to suggest that the sixth form is currently less effective than the rest of the school. In fact your actions and those of other leaders have brought about rapid improvement in the sixth form with strong evidence that these improvements are sustainable. Governors are highly supportive of your work.

You have established a culture where pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. They are proud of their school, are self-disciplined and their conduct around the school is exemplary.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have developed a culture where staff and pupils understand their safeguarding responsibilities, systems and policies. Clear records demonstrate how well staff are inducted and regularly updated on child protection and safeguarding requirements. Staff are able to explain how referrals to partner agencies work. The climate of care and responsibility is clear. Staff and pupils' views help shape and change policies.

Pupils and staff feel safe. The school building and security systems help keep them secure. Pupils' conduct around the school also adds to the safe environment as they behave very well around the site and 'look out for each other'. The needs of children looked after are managed well. All statutory requirements for safeguarding are met.

Inspection findings

- The progress of pupils across a range of subjects is close to or above average. English has a long and successful track record of above-average pupil progress and strong results. The picture in mathematics is more mixed. Historically disadvantaged pupils in the school have made as much progress as all pupils nationally given their starting points. However, in mathematics disadvantaged pupils have made markedly less progress than other pupils. The school's teaching of and support for current pupils is resulting in pupil performance information suggesting that all pupils are now making similar progress.
- In 2016, Year 11 pupils gained notably strong outcomes in a wide range of subjects including health and social care, child development, hospitality and catering, English language, drama and physical education.
- During the inspection pupils' behaviour was excellent. At change of lessons pupils moved around the school quickly and purposefully, allowing learning to get off to a good start. Ofsted's online parent survey, Parent View, received 137 parent responses. Most agreed that the school deals well with behaviour, but 30% disagreed. We spoke to pupils about behaviour and they told us that even at its worst, instances were limited to 'low-level disruption' (their words) and even this was rare. We judged that this view of parents was not well founded.

- Pupils told us that any bullying was very rare and would not be tolerated. They felt well cared for by staff. One pupil told us that 'bullying is unlikely to happen here because it's just not what Belfairs students do'.
- In the sixth form, external examination information shows that in both 2015 and 2016 learners made better than average progress on vocational courses, but less than average progress on academic A-level courses. The school has taken significant steps to improve the progress and results of current students, but the final impact will not be seen until next summer when they complete their courses. In the past the school has tended to provide a sixth form curriculum that was not aimed well enough to meet the needs, interests and abilities of its learners. Now students have to demonstrate their potential to succeed before embarking on A-level courses through more realistic entry requirements.
- Careers information, advice and guidance for learners starting the sixth form has improved and helps learners to select appropriate courses. Additionally, teachers' assessments of how well learners are doing are more accurate. This leads to effective tracking of learners' progress, monitoring and interventions using the approach that has proved successful in raising standards in the main school.
- Sixth form learners told us that teachers' use of the monitoring systems leads to their feeling supported and challenged in their learning.
- Teaching across the school is generally strong and effective. You have recognised that challenge for the most able pupils is a priority in order for the school to make further progress. Your systems are strong to check on the progress they are making, but as we saw together, there remains some inconsistency in the extent to which teachers provide sufficient challenge during lessons.
- Attendance is broadly average, but the most recent published data shows that disadvantaged pupils are over-represented among absent pupils. Similarly, while the number of fixed-term exclusions is not large, disadvantaged pupils are over-represented. You argue persuasively that one of the reasons is your inclusivity and that you keep pupils in school and on the school's attendance register that other schools might move on.
- Your school's high-quality careers guidance leads to high aspirations, resulting in applications for universities and apprenticeships. You have chosen not to provide work experience for all key stage 4 pupils. All pupils ending Year 11 go on to a further education course or employment with training. Pupils I spoke to were aiming to enter a range of local sixth forms or colleges and during our visit pupils were preparing for your forthcoming careers fair.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- good progress in mathematics for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, is seen in actual examination results
- no groups of pupils are over-represented in absences or exclusions
- all teachers provide effective challenge to raise the achievement of all pupils and especially the most able.

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

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we held meetings with you, other members of the senior leadership team, a group of subject leaders, the chair of the governing body and two governors, a group of teachers, a group of sixth form learners and a group of Year 11 pupils. During three tours of the school, two with you and one with the headteacher, we visited each classroom and observed pupils at work. Documents including those relating to safeguarding, school improvement planning, pupil achievement and attendance and governance were examined. We also took account of the views of parents who responded to Parent View. We also examined the school's website and found it to be useful, informative and complying with requirements.

My key lines of enquiry for this inspection were:

1. Is the quality of provision in the sixth form as good as that in the main school?
2. What is the school doing to improve attendance and achievement for disadvantaged pupils? Why do disadvantaged pupils do better in English than in mathematics?
3. How effective are the school's safeguarding policies?
4. How well challenged are the most able pupils?
5. What is the school's approach to enterprise and employability? How well advised and guided are students in their post-16 choices?