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Ms Gaynor Cheshire
Principal
Birmingham Ormiston Academy
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Dear Ms Cheshire

Short inspection of Birmingham Ormiston Academy

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 2017 with Lois Kelly, 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. Leaders and governors have developed a unique and inspiring creative curriculum for young people at the school. They have forged strong links with professionals from the creative industries who influence the learning of pupils and students, giving them exceptional real-life experience of the creative, digital and performing arts in professional settings. You, your staff and governors are ambitious for the pupils in the school. Pupils describe being at the school as a 'privilege'. Parents support this overwhelmingly and say, 'The staff are friendly, supportive and exude enthusiasm that is infectious.'

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to improve the effectiveness of planning actions to secure school improvement. There is now a clear cycle of school evaluation and school improvement planning. In addition, all members of the senior leadership team have their own action plans which are reviewed and evaluated regularly. Middle leaders develop departmental improvement plans which are driven by whole-school priorities. Clear and measurable objectives are set with timescales. Senior and middle leaders are held to account for their performance against these objectives. Governors regularly hold senior leaders to account for their performance. They review whole-school priorities systematically and can identify where improvements have been made.

Tutor time is now used effectively within the school. There is a clear programme of planned study which tutors follow. This focuses on personal development and

fundamental British values. The tutor groups facilitate the further development of the harmonious and friendly atmosphere within the school. Pupils and students in tutor groups engage in a range of activities, including political debate, charity fundraising and the discussion of a range of contemporary issues that are pertinent to them. Leaders closely monitor and evaluate the tutor programme.

Overall progress in the school at key stage 4 is good, although there is still some in-school variation. Progress in science, humanities and modern foreign languages still needs to improve. In key stage 5, progress in applied qualifications is very strong, but improvements are still required to ensure that progress in academic qualifications is as rapid.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all procedures to keep pupils safe are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Pupils feel safe and secure at the school and say that they are taught to be safe. They were able to tell us about the guidance that they have received on e-safety and anti-radicalisation. Staff training is regular and comprehensive. They regularly receive additional information about safeguarding issues to keep them up to date. Governors check that statutory responsibilities are met. A governor has specific responsibility for the oversight of safeguarding in the school.

Pupils told us that they feel very safe, that bullying incidents are extremely rare and that, when they do occur, pupils report them and they are dealt with effectively. They told us that the school was very supportive and cared for their welfare. They feel confident to speak to staff about any issue that may affect them, and described being at the school as like being part of 'one big family'.

Inspection findings

- In the past, students have been allowed to select too many A-level courses. An action plan is now in place with a focus on ensuring that students receive appropriate information and guidance to help them choose suitable academic courses in the sixth form.
- The progress of pupils studying the applied pathway, for example the acting pathway, in key stage 5 and key stage 4 is very strong. Teachers and pupils are enthusiastic about the opportunities and the experiences that this pathway provides. Progress in this area is a strength of the school and is acknowledged by staff, parents and young people.
- Progress in academic subjects in the sixth form does not yet match the very strong progress in applied general qualifications. Leaders are well aware of this difference and clear plans are in place to address the discrepancy. However, in A-level lessons, teachers do not use questioning effectively to challenge students and develop their understanding. Students' responses to questions are limited because of a narrow use of their technical vocabulary. This means that students are unable to engage fully in a learning dialogue with the teacher or their peers.

Progress during lessons is not thoroughly checked, with teachers too often focusing on a few students rather than ensuring the understanding of all and intervening where necessary.

- Leaders have introduced a more rigorous system for monitoring and assessing the progress of students studying A levels. This enables senior and middle leaders to identify any student falling behind and intervene in a more focused way. Consequently, current achievement information for A-level students shows improved progress. Leaders are confident in the reliability and validity of this monitoring information because of the more regular and systematic way that it is collected.
- Leaders judge the progress of disadvantaged pupils in the school to be in line with that of other pupils within the school. These pupils are now closely monitored by leaders and teachers. Additional support is put in place where required, particularly for disadvantaged low-ability pupils. For example, teaching assistants in English and mathematics lessons provide extra support. Pupils have told leaders that they value this support.
- In 2016, girls' progress was a little weaker than boys' in science, modern foreign languages and humanities. However, current monitoring information shows that girls' progress has improved and is now exceeding that of boys.
- Subject leaders in science, modern foreign languages and humanities value the improved data tracking system because it means that leaders and teachers can respond swiftly to any slower progress of pupils in key stage 4.
- Pupils and students have a range of inspiring and unique opportunities through the wider curriculum at the school, which challenge and motivate. Opportunities include involvement in productions at the Old Rep theatre and working closely with professionals nationally and internationally in the creative, digital and performing arts.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and almost all parents who completed the parent questionnaire said that they would recommend the school to another parent. Almost all parents say that their child is well looked after and feels safe at school.
- In some subjects in key stage 4, teachers' questions do not develop pupils' deep understanding. Teachers are sometimes too accepting of simple answers. In these subjects, teachers do not expect the same high standards as they do in most subjects. Consequently, although pupils are attentive, they do not demonstrate the enthusiasm that is evident in other areas of the curriculum, for example in musical theatre and dance lessons.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teaching and learning are consistently characterised by high expectations and a high level of challenge, including through teachers' questioning, so that all pupils,

including students taking academic qualifications in the sixth form, make the progress of which they are capable

- leaders establish changes in the information and guidance procedures, so that all students at key stage 5 study the most appropriate courses.

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

Yours sincerely

Karen Lockett
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors joined members of the leadership team in short visits to lessons and spoke to pupils about their work and looked in their books. Inspectors met with you and other senior leaders, including the designated lead for safeguarding and the chair of the governing body.

Inspectors evaluated a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and action plan, recent information on pupils' progress and the quality of teaching, and other records about keeping pupils safe.

Pupils gave inspectors their views on the school when they spoke to us during a formal meeting, in lessons, at social times and through the 112 responses to the pupil questionnaire. Staff's views were taken into account through the 47 responses to an inspection questionnaire for staff. The views of parents were considered through the 182 responses to Parent View.