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Mr Hart
Principal
Strood Academy
Carnation Road
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Dear Mr Hart

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Strood Academy

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy with Kekshan Saleria HMI on 1 and 2 February 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, staff with specific responsibilities, groups of students and the Chair of the Governing Body, who is also a representative of the sponsors.

Context

Strood academy was created by bringing together Chapter Girls' School and Temple Boys' School in September 2009. Both predecessor schools had low attainment and were part of the National Challenge programme. The academy is sponsored by the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) and co-sponsored by Medway Council. It has Business and Enterprise and Mathematics as its specialisms. The academy has occupied a single site since August 2010, utilising 16 temporary classrooms as part of its accommodation. There are plans to move in to purpose built accommodation on the same site in September 2012. The academy has adopted a four period day with each lesson lasting eighty minutes. Students in KS4 have remained in single sex classes for the core subjects and for all subjects in Year 11. There are more girls

than boys and most of the 1347 students, including 225 in the sixth form, are of White British Heritage. Around one in twenty students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. More students have special educational needs and/or disabilities than is typical for a school of this size, although the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs is close to the average. Many of these students have autistic spectrum disorders, moderate learning difficulties or behaviour, emotional and social difficulties.

The majority of staff transferred from the predecessor schools but there have been a number of staff changes in the academy's first year. The academy is becoming increasingly popular and the number of students enrolled in the main school and in the sixth form is increasing.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Students join the academy with attainment that is generally below or well below average. Progress in lessons seen ranged from good to inadequate. The academy's tracking data and evidence from examinations already taken shows that attainment, particularly at Key Stage 4, is rising. Current data show no significant differences in outcomes for different groups other than that girls' attainment is currently significantly higher than boys' attainment. The quality of learning is improving because of higher expectations, improved attendance and behaviour and students' increasingly positive attitudes to learning.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The academy has met its challenging target for a significant reduction in persistent absence and attendance is now close to the national average. This improvement can be attributed to the range of actions taken to support and challenge students who have previously not attended well.

Behaviour in the majority of lessons and around the academy is generally good. Most students require little more than gentle prompting to modify their behaviour in line with the academy's high expectations. Senior leaders are very visible and students say that this has contributed to improvements in behaviour. In the small minority of weaker lessons, where students are not sufficiently engaged or challenged, low level disruptive behaviour slows learning. Students say that they feel safe and that their views and opinions are taken into account.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is variable but most lessons are at least satisfactory and the proportion of good or better lessons is improving. Lessons observed ranged from outstanding to inadequate. The best lessons are characterised by good relationships

at all levels; effective use of questioning to develop students' understanding; high expectations of what students can achieve, both in the lesson and over time; brisk pace and a high level of challenge which is appropriate to the level at which students are working.

In the majority of lessons, teachers' planning does not take sufficient account of the good range of information that is available about students' specific needs. Consequently, tasks and activities do not always meet the needs of the different groups of students and there is not enough recognition of how students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are to be supported effectively in the classroom.

Students comment favourably on the development that has taken place in relation to the KS4 curriculum, which now provides a wider choice of options. There is an increasing range of after school clubs and activities that further enrich the curriculum and help students to make up lost ground. Students also appreciate the broad range of visits and visitors. There are now more opportunities for students to have access to information and communication technology (ICT) equipment, although teachers do not systematically build on students' skills in ICT or consistently provide opportunities for students to apply and develop their ICT skills in lessons. The academy's specialisms have been used to encourage community participation. For example, parents and carers are invited to build on their basic skills so that they are better able to support their children's learning, and support staff are encouraged and supported to improve their own qualifications and skills. There are developing links with other educational institutions that are intended to support development of the specialisms.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The academy is led well. The Principal and senior team have an ambitious vision for the academy and they have been successful in raising staff morale and bringing together two very different communities.

Now that the academy has been consolidated on a single site and is becoming established the pace of improvement has begun to accelerate. Senior leaders have already secured improvement in some key areas. Good examples of this are success in raising student achievement at KS4 and significant improvements in student behaviour and attendance. The positive impact of the actions taken demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement. Senior leaders have challenged poor staff performance and have provided appropriate professional development and coaching, which is having a positive impact on improving teaching.

Although senior leaders have an accurate view of the academy's performance, departmental reviews are not sufficiently rigorous and do not provide detailed evidence of strengths and weaknesses that can be used to guide development planning. For example, monitoring at this level does not focus sufficiently on learning

and progress. Senior leaders are aware that middle leadership needs further development, as it is not yet having a significant impact on accelerating the pace of improvement and improving student outcomes. The governing body is well informed and governors are holding the academy to account. They have ensured that safeguarding arrangements meet or exceed statutory requirements with elements of good practice.

External support

The academy's School Improvement Partner has provided an appropriate level of challenge and support and has helped shape the academy's development. Productive partnerships that motivate and support students are being developed with a range of organisations, including UCA and other local schools.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Build on improvements to leadership and management at middle leadership level so that leaders and managers are held accountable and enabled to drive improvement.
- Ensure that assessment information is used consistently well to support learning for all different groups of students.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Group at the Department for Education. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Robert Ellis
Her Majesty's Inspector