

Serco Inspections
Boundary House
2 Wythall Green Way
Middle Lane
BIRMINGHAM
West Midlands
B47 6LW

OFSTED
T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

SERCO
Direct T 0121 683 2888

5 November 2010

Ruth Harker
Principal
Shenley Academy
Shenley Lane
Northfield
West Midlands
B29 4HE

Dear Mrs Harker

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Shenley Academy 361983

Introduction

Following my visit with David Rzeznik HMI and James McNeillie HMI to your academy on Wednesday 3 November 2010, 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, senior leaders, groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of the sponsor.

Context

The Shenley Court Specialist Arts College and Sixth Form Centre was redesignated as the Shenley Academy in September 2009. The sponsor, E-ACT, appointed an education adviser to link with the academy and nominated a governor to represent the trust on the governing body. The principal appointed in September 2009 was previously executive headteacher of the predecessor school from 2005 to 2008. On becoming an academy, science was added to existing specialisms in performing and creative arts. The senior leadership team was restructured and extended to include two seconded posts. A new extended leadership team includes faculty directors as assistant principals. Opportunity was taken to re-structure faculties to designate

curriculum leaders for English and mathematics with responsibility for Key Stage 3 and 4. An assistant principal was appointed in April 2010 to lead work on intervention and learning support. Plans are well advanced for Shenley Academy to move to new buildings on the same site, in September 2012.

Shenley Academy is average in size. There are currently 874 on roll, including 173 in the sixth form. Numbers have declined in recent years although this trend is beginning to change with stronger recruitment into Year 7, and the sixth form. Attainment on entry is well below the national average, although attainment scores have been closer to average in the last two years, and reflect a wider range of ability. Even so, low levels of literacy are identified as a barrier on entry, and for late admissions. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well above the national average, and rising. The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds with a range of other minority ethnic groups represented. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average. Most of these students have moderate learning difficulties and/or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The resource base for students with hearing impairments was relocated by the local authority in September 2009. Nine students with a hearing impairment remain on roll and receive continuity of support from the authority's central service. Increasing numbers of students continue their education beyond the age of 16 in the sixth form or with other local providers. The academy is part of a collaborative group of local secondary schools and colleges that offer a range of joint provision at both Key Stage 4 and post-16.

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

The academy has been successful in tackling the trend of low standards in the predecessor school for all groups of students. Although standards remain low there has been notable improvement. Unvalidated results for 2010 indicate that 85% of Year 11 students gained five or more A* to C grades in GCSE examinations, an increase of 42 percentage points. This reflects improvement across a wide range of GCSE and BTEC courses. The proportion of students to attain this benchmark including English and mathematics, increased from 25% to 33% to exceed the national floor target. In English, 45% of students gained a grade A*-C, and 44% in mathematics. This represents an improvement on the predecessor school although well below national figures. Leaders have identified variation across some courses by gender to inform further refinement to intervention strategies. This progress has been a direct result of the higher expectation set, and a good response from students evident in improved levels of attendance. The expanded curriculum to better meet students' needs, and continued focus on improving the quality of teaching has been particularly beneficial.

Standards have improved in Key Stage 3 from a low base. Targets have been reviewed for all cohorts to increase the level of challenge, and to ensure that rigorous monitoring and tailored intervention can commence from Year 7. Provision

for students with specific literacy difficulties has improved recently with a range of programmes to develop reading and writing skills. Initial assessments are encouraging.

Unvalidated results for the sixth form indicate that standards are lower than those attained in the predecessor school. Leaders have taken action to revise the curriculum, improve the target setting process and strengthen monitoring processes to provide a consistent approach across Year 7 to 13.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students enjoy academy life as demonstrated by their above average attendance. They have very positive attitudes to learning and are keen to succeed. Students' behaviour is good and racial harmony is an important strength in this multiracial school. Students say that people from different backgrounds get on very well. The number of racist incidents is low and when they do occur they are appropriately logged and reported to others. Fixed-term exclusions have reduced by half in the last 12 months. A good range of effective strategies are used by departments and senior staff to ensure exclusion is used as a last resort.

The newly introduced tutor group system with students of mixed ages is popular and valued by students. Mixing students and creating smaller tutor groups has led to improved relationships amongst students and staff. Greater one-to-one support and personal attention helps to meet individual needs. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities feel well supported.

The effectiveness of provision

At the time of the visit a new initiative known as the 'November strategy' was in place for Year 11 to boost students' skills in the core subjects. The normal teaching timetable had been modified to help prepare students for their English examinations and modular tests in mathematics and science. Students had been assessed and areas for development identified to focus teaching on bringing about improvement in basic skills. The strategy is clearly worthwhile, as gaps in learning are being closed. However, assessment information is not always used effectively to ensure work is pitched at the right level so all students are suitably challenged. Teaching in English and mathematics is improving but leaders recognise that teaching in these subjects is inconsistent. Students' spelling, punctuation and grammatical skills are weak. While the English department is attempting to tackle past inadequacies in students' learning, the development of literacy skills in other subjects is not robust enough. A new spelling policy has been introduced but it is too early to judge its impact. Lesson observation indicate that there are also too few opportunities for students to develop their speaking skills in class. Many students lack confidence when speaking aloud.

There is a good proportion of effective teaching and learning, particularly in drama and science. There are some key strengths that are evident in nearly all lessons. Good relationships exist between students and their teachers. This means learning is conducted in a positive climate. Lesson objectives are routinely shared with students so they know what must be achieved. In the most effective lessons good use is made of assessment information to ensure work is properly matched to all students' capabilities. Teachers' pinpoint individual learning weaknesses and rectify them quickly. Work is challenging and interesting and activities are enjoyable and motivate students to learn at a good rate. Students' understanding and use of assessment criteria are developing well to help them to improve the quality of their work. In the less effective lessons work for individuals or groups is not pitched quite right, so individuals find the work too difficult or too easy. Teachers do not always adjust their planning or grouping of students so their needs are met. At times, there is too much talking or explanation by teachers and too few opportunities for students to work independently or to find things out for themselves.

The curriculum has improved to provide greater variety and flexibility, particularly in Key Stages 3 and 4. However, literacy and oracy skills are not developed sufficiently in all subjects. Vocational education has been expanded with courses such as creative media, music, dance, travel and tourism, leading to qualifications that are recognised in the local labour market. Other courses such as Diplomas and Young Apprenticeships are provided that meet students' interests and aspirations. Students say that they enjoy the financial capability and BTEC work skills provision as it prepares them well for the next stage of education or employment. In Year 9, the increase in information and communication technology provision is successful in raising standards. Sixth form provision is improving with a wider range of A/S, A level and BTEC courses. Students say that they like extended project work because they can work independently and in depth on topics that interest them, and gain worthwhile accreditation for their efforts.

The performing arts curriculum has been further developed and enriched through links with the Birmingham Rep Theatre. The theatre has provided acting, and voice training with specialist tuition in other areas to further develop students' performing skills. As a result, the number of students taking extra-curricular activities, particularly girls, in music, dance and drama has increased substantially. Expertise within the science department is being used effectively to improve curriculum provision in other faculties.

Students are well cared for and supervised effectively at all times. Sixth formers say that the academic and personal guidance they received prior to post-16 study was of good quality. This ensured that they were on courses that matched their needs and aspirations.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The academy is very well led by the principal, senior leadership team and extended leadership team. They have a relentless focus on raising standards which is clearly demonstrated through the rise in standards in the Key Stage 4 examinations. A clear strategic vision that is shared by staff at all levels is underpinned by high aspirations and a belief that students can and will succeed. Staff have created a safe and open learning environment which has resulted in a strong sense of pride and belonging amongst students. Students are very clear that the school's reputation in the community is growing.

A thorough and systematic approach to self-evaluation ensures that priorities are shared and understood. Leaders conduct regular and comprehensive evaluation of performance information and take swift action to tackle areas of concern, or barriers to higher standards. Strategic plans are detailed; actions to be taken are clear with monitoring arrangements linked to specific success criteria. This provides senior leaders, governors and the sponsor with an accurate picture of strengths and areas for further review and improvement. The role of faculty directors has developed to increase capacity for strategic development and leadership. This approach has strengthened lines of accountability linked to the review of assessment information. There is a clear strategy for improving teaching with regular reviews linked to training and coaching. Joint observation is used well to share skills and to secure consistent judgements. This approach is supported by an effective programme of faculty reviews and quality assurance activities that includes the use of student views. Leaders have correctly identified the need to strengthen the use of assessment in the planning and teaching of lessons to improve consistency. Plans are well advanced to support this.

The school's safeguarding procedures are satisfactory. The recently updated single central register contains all of the required information. All staff, including the designated person, have been suitably trained to fulfil their child protection responsibilities. However, there is a lack of clarity about who should be contacted in the event of an allegation made about a member of staff. Security procedures are adequate. The school lacks a formal risk assessment of the premises and grounds.

Links with external partners and partnership working is a strength. For example, links with the local professional football club provides positive role models for young people and numerous opportunities for football training. The school is working with local primaries on developing pupils' food technology and cooking skills. The initiative is helping to develop primary pupils' life skills and improve their health.

The governing body makes a positive impact on the work of the school and members bring a wide range of skills and expertise to their role, and provide effective links to subject areas. The education adviser makes regular visits to the academy to review progress on behalf of the sponsor. A very helpful 'score card' provides an effective rating of key indicators to track progress over time, and to provide feedback to the E-ACT board. The academy has demonstrated, through

recent improvements in standards, the curriculum, progress tracking and intervention that it has good capacity to improve.

External support

The academy benefits greatly from a range of useful links and partners. The E-ACT education adviser and National Challenge adviser provide a good level of challenge to the academy. Consultants from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust work effectively with staff in English and mathematics to review courses, improve the use of assessment, and leadership.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of consistently good and outstanding teaching through the use of assessment to adjust lesson plans, student grouping and tasks to meet students' specific learning needs.
- Promote students' literacy, oracy and independent learning skills so that they are better able to drive their own learning and progress.
- Raise standards and increase rates of progress in the sixth form by ensuring that established monitoring procedures become firmly embedded.

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

Nada Trikić
Her Majesty's Inspector