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Ms J Farrell
Ormiston Sandwell Community Academy
Lower City Road
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Dear Ms Farrell

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Ormiston Sandwell Community Academy

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy with Clive Kempton HMI on 9 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, senior leaders and nominated staff, groups of students and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Context

The academy opened in September 2009 in the buildings of the predecessor school. Its opening was accelerated. The staffing structure was established during the first term of operation and the final appointments to complete the senior leadership team took up their posts at the start of the summer term of 2010.

There are 762 students between the ages of 11 and 18 on roll with 25 in the sixth form. An above average proportion of the students are from minority ethnic groups and more than average are known to be eligible for free school meals. Significant numbers of students speak English as an additional language. The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly below average

in Key Stage 4, but above average in Key Stage 3. The specialisms are the Arts and English and literacy.

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

When students arrive in the academy, they have attained levels that are broadly but just below average. By the end of Year 11, standards are broadly average but rising in some aspects. For example, in 2010 there was a rise of 17% in the number of students gaining five or more passes in GCSE examinations at grade C or above, including mathematics and English. The attainment of all groups of students improved and an above average number gained five passes. Attainment in mathematics and English remains low. Progress is satisfactory overall, but girls made less progress than boys in 2010, as did those students known to be eligible for free school meals and Indian students. Current data collected on the progress students are now making, shows that these differences have been removed and all groups are performing similarly. The strong care and support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities means they make slightly better progress than other groups.

Progress in lessons is satisfactory. New assessment procedures are conducted every half term and greatly improved data tracking systems are allowing leaders to identify underachievement early and take remedial action. The results of assessment are available on-line to parents who sign up for the system, which also alerts them to attendance issues.

Progress in lessons is at least satisfactory. Where the work is clearly matched to individual needs and where teaching enthuses and excites students, they make good progress. They rise to challenges well and demonstrate the ability to work independently and in groups. Progress is slower where the level of intellectual challenge is either too high or too low.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students have responded very positively to the change of status to an academy. They told inspectors how much things have improved, such as behaviour, and of their pride in being part of the academy. Attendance is improving, but is still low despite much hard work being done to address the issue. A difficulty arises because some students are choosing when to attend. For example, attendance on the special days devoted to personal, social and health education and the last day of each term have noticeably lower attendance. Attendance in the sixth form is also poor.

Persistent absence has reduced, but currently the academy has access to insufficient education welfare officer time to follow up issues of poor attendance.

Behaviour is satisfactory. Behaviour in lessons does not disrupt learning. However, many students remain passive in lessons and so their behaviour is not actively making a strong contribution to learning. In unstructured sessions, at break and lunchtime, inspectors observed safe and polite, but sometimes noisy behaviour. Students are happy that there is little or no bullying and very little, if any, racist behaviour. All groups were seen to interact pleasantly and happily together. Many students are increasingly taking advantage of the opportunities the academy is providing for them to make a positive contribution. The student council has achieved recognition for its effectiveness. Students make a strong contribution to the local community and to improving the lives of others through charity work. The academy is in the process of setting up arrangements for students to contribute to developing the quality of learning through lesson feedback. Students should be commended for taking care of the buildings, despite the fact that they are dowdy in places. The annual Spectrum event, celebrating Eid, Diwali and bonfire night, attracts very large numbers from the whole community.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching is satisfactory, but with an increasing range of good features. A greater proportion of teaching is good, and a small amount of outstanding teaching was observed and inadequate teaching has almost been eradicated. Strenuous work to tackle the quality of teaching has resulted in a much improved profile since the first review by the sponsor, when the academy had been operational for 6 months. At that time it was judged to be inadequate. Many teachers demonstrate the attributes of good teaching, but there is too much emphasis in planning on the activities that students will do, as opposed to what they will learn. As a result, these activities keep students busy, but do not produce better than satisfactory learning. The common lesson plan and the new system for sharing learning objectives with students have supported the improved consistency across subjects in the quality of teaching. Good examples of effective practice were seen, for example in English and dance. Assessment is a weaker aspect of teaching. This is especially so for diagnostic assessment carried out by teachers as the lesson proceeds, to enable them to adjust their teaching. Lesson plans often identify the students with English as an additional language or special educational needs and/or disabilities, but the strategies for meeting their individual needs are not clearly identified. Students confirmed that usually everyone does the same work.

There are sections in some less effective lessons, when the pace drops for some or all of the students, because they are expected to listen passively for too long. Behaviour remains satisfactory and the systems for redirecting off-task behaviour are effective in the vast majority of cases. However, although not disrupting, students are not being allowed to put into practice the independent learning

strategies they are being supported to develop in the tutor sessions. Some teachers are using question and answer sessions well to deepen the understanding of more able students, but generally the level of intellectual challenge for this group is insufficiently demanding. Although teachers are providing opportunities for group work, they do not always encourage students to verbalise their ideas, even if they then do not volunteer them in full class discussions.

Technology is being used well to support learning and progress, including the interactive whiteboards in classrooms. Resources are good and many teachers are taking considerable trouble to produce resources which motivate and engage. Opportunities are missed to use the physical environment of the classrooms and corridors to model what excellence will look like. The arts specialism is under-used to create vibrant and attractive surroundings, especially in the entrance area.

The curriculum is being developed with an increasing number of pathways and alternatives at Key Stage 4. Some innovative changes to the curriculum are being developed to support transition from primary schools and the development of independent learners. Cross-curricular lessons covering English, humanities and literacy which are delivered using recognised good primary school practice, are used effectively to ease transition and are much appreciated by students. Each day there are structured tutor sessions in mixed-age groups to support both the acquisition of study skills and academic mentoring for individual students.

The care, guidance and support for students are stronger aspects of provision and safeguarding procedures are secure. As a result students feel safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The Principal has managed the difficult transition to academy status sensitively but firmly, meaning that issues have been minimal and staff morale is good. The capacity of the senior leadership team has been strengthened by new appointments. All members of staff are committed to improvement and are increasingly using challenging targets to ensure standards continue to rise. Middle leadership is developing satisfactorily. Governors, who have a good range of skills and expertise, and the sponsors at Ormiston Academies Trust challenge and support the academy's leaders well. Monitoring is thorough and based on a clear process of line management. There is a rigorous and effective system for gathering evidence both formally and informally from a wide range of sources, in order to inform self-evaluation. The systems for gathering data on student progress are relatively new and still not sufficiently integrated to allow searching analysis of outcomes and thereby strengthen self-evaluation. Nevertheless, leaders know the strengths and areas for improvement and use this knowledge to drive a good range of strategies for delivering professional development in an effective model. Coaching systems are in place to build internal capacity and thereby the capacity to improve. Development planning lacks rigour in that timescales are imprecise, as are the responsibilities for

monitoring and evaluating progress towards the targets. The effectiveness of leadership is starting to be seen in the improving picture in teaching and the growing student satisfaction, but some initiatives are very new, so that their impact is not yet measurable. However the community have more confidence in the academy and the numbers applying for a place in 2011 have risen significantly for the first time.

The impact of the academy's specialism is still weak in terms of a strong and instantly obvious influence on the ethos of the academy. However, there are many examples of the positive impact in artistic performances and links through these with the community. Outcomes in the specialist subjects are satisfactory.

Sixth form outcomes are inadequate at present. The new leader has not yet had time to make a significant impact, but planned changes to increase numbers are ambitious. There is a very limited curriculum with only three courses provided at present. Inspectors were unable to observe much teaching because of the exceptionally small numbers providing very few opportunities.

External support

The academy continues to receive good support from the sponsors through the work of consultants and their assistance in linking up with other establishment to share good practice. The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust is providing good support in the professional development of staff.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve attendance to at least 93%.
- Improve teaching to at least 70% good or better and ensure lessons deliver an appropriate level of intellectual challenge for different levels of ability and allow students to use and hone their skills as independent learners.
- Tighten and consolidate the use of data on student progress in order to allow leaders at all levels to have a sharper focus on student outcomes when evaluating the work in their areas and to strengthen development planning.
- Ensure the specialism contributes to whole school improvement by improving outcomes in the specialist subjects and enhancing the ethos and appearance of the academy.

- Improve outcomes in the sixth form and increase the curriculum offer to attract more 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

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc Joyce Hodgetts, Chair of the Governing Body
The Academies Group, DfE [Paul.hann@education.gsi.gov.uk]