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10 December 2010

Mrs Walker
Principal
Ormiston Park Academy
Nethan Drive
Aveley
RM15 4RU

Dear Mrs Walker

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Ormiston Park Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Robert Ellis HMI to your academy on 8 and 9 December 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 including the academy development plan, record and the summary of lesson observation, achievement and attainment data and met with the Principal, other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governor Body, the Chief Executive of the Ormiston Trust, staff and groups of students.

Context

The academy serves a community that is more disadvantaged than most. There are 547 students on roll of which 28 are in the sixth form. The largest proportion of students is White British. The amount of students who are eligible for free school meals is significantly higher than the national average. Over half of the students have special educational needs and/or disability and those with a statement of special educational needs are also higher than the national average. The proportion of students whose home language is not English is below average. There is a

discrete facility, called the 'Ascend Unit', used to support students with complex behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. All these students have statements to meet their special educational needs. Senior leaders have had difficulty recruiting to posts in some subjects which include mathematics. A quarter of the middle leadership team are new to post in September 2010. The academy's subject specialisms are English and creative and cultural skills. The academy has become a training school for Thinking Skills, having been granted Thinking Skills status.

The academy has received approval and financial support for the new academy building. The proposed development is likely to be completed in 2013.

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

The proportion of students who attained five or more good GCSEs in 2010 was significantly above the national average. The proportion of students who achieved five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, was below average. However, the proportion of pupils who achieved five or more GCSEs, including English and mathematics, surpassed the academy's own challenging target. In 2010, students made outstanding progress in their learning; unvalidated data indicate that the academy is in the top one per cent of school's nationally. Exceptionally good progress was made in English, although students' progress was not as strong in mathematics. No groups of students underachieved.

In the lessons observed by inspectors, students learned well when they were given a variety of stimulating tasks, which challenged them and were linked to prior and future learning. Students work well in groups especially when teachers have closely matched their skills and abilities to enable them to learn effectively from each other. There were good examples of students being able to effectively assess their own learning and that of others.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students' behaviour in lessons and around the academy was mainly good during the inspection. Their attendance is improving and is broadly average. Students feel safe and well supported by academy staff. They feel their views are taken into account, although sixth form students would like more opportunities to contribute to the life of the academy.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is improving and helping to accelerate the pace of students' learning and progress. Teachers generally use a standard proforma for planning students' learning, which also identifies the various needs of students in the class. In the best lessons, teachers use group and paired work well to increase students' enjoyment and to provide a good platform for discussions of lesson objectives.

Teachers implement clear building blocks of learning which enable students to develop their understanding as the lesson progresses. In a few less successful lessons, teachers talk for long periods of time, inhibiting students from making good progress in their learning. In these lessons there are limited opportunities for students to work independently and students are not always appropriately challenged in their learning. Although a variety of students' performance data is available to teachers, planning is occasionally too generic and does not take full account of the differing needs or abilities of students. Some teachers use highly effective probing questions to assess what students have learned and identify quickly areas where students are struggling; this was not always the case in a few of the weaker lessons. In the very good examples of marked work seen the 'what went well' (WWW) and 'even better if' (EBI) notation is used effectively by teachers to identify the next steps of learning. However, teachers do not all use these methods consistently to give students a good understanding of how to improve their work.

The academy has adopted a highly responsive approach to developing its curriculum to enable students to achieve well. The curriculum is well organised and extremely imaginative in both key stages. In Key Stage 3 the 'nurture group' gives the most vulnerable pupils the most appropriate curriculum and the best start at the academy to enable them to be develop social, emotional and academic skills to learn more effectively. If students are not ready to be integrated into the mainstream curriculum there is an opportunity to study in the 'success centre' until they are ready for re-integration into mainstream curriculum in Key Stage 4. The three-year Key Stage 4 curriculum provides a good breadth of courses and innovative one-year vocational course options where students can achieve qualifications in a year, after which they are free to choose different options. The subject specialisms of English and creative and cultural skills are having a positive impact on students' attainment in English.

The academy has given care, guidance and support for students a high priority. There are very strong systems in place to intervene and provide support to more vulnerable students including those in the 'Ascend Unit'. Students are confident that teachers provide effective support to help them improve their work. However, leaders do not, at present, analyse systematically the provision of support to assess how effective these strategies are. The sound measures the academy has adopted have enabled leaders and managers to maintain broadly average attendance rates. They are continuing to implement appropriate strategies to reduce the proportion of students who are persistently absent and improve attendance and punctuality rates overall.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The highly effective actions implemented by senior and middle leaders have resulted in improved outcomes across the academy. For example, rigorous monitoring by senior leaders has provided them with a firm understanding of the strengths and

areas for improvements in teaching across the academy. Consequently, leaders have made very good progress in reducing the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching. Students' behaviour has also improved, as a result of the consistent implementation of management strategies. The academy's development plan focuses sharply on its key priorities. Self-evaluation is accurate; targets set by leaders in respect of students' achievements are extremely challenging and are being met. Management responsibilities are clearly defined at all levels. This enables leaders to scrutinise their performance in many areas effectively although reviews of the work of subject leaders by senior leaders are less well developed. Analysis and monitoring of students' performance data have enabled leaders to identify underperformance accurately in subject areas and to put in place good measures to bring about improvement for individuals. Effective support systems are in place to improve the performance of students at risk of underachieving. Partnerships to improve outcomes for students including more vulnerable groups are becoming well established, especially those to develop the sixth form. The academy has set itself an ambitious target to increase the numbers of students in the sixth form in the next few years. However, leaders recognise that further work needs to be undertaken to ensure that Ormiston makes a stronger contribution to the shared sixth form.

The role of the governing body is developing well. Governors are providing a good level of challenge to the academy's work. The skills of many governors appear to be well matched to the needs of the academy.

External support

The School Improvement Partner has worked effectively to provide support to senior leaders. The support from the Ormiston Trust is having a good impact particularly in improving the quality of teaching and assessment. Partnerships to improve the quality of provision especially in the sixth form are working well.

Main Judgements

The academy has made outstanding progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that teachers use assessment information consistently to set appropriate levels of challenge for all students and make certain that the quality of marking reflects best practice across all subjects.
- Ensure that senior leaders consider how to better develop the sixth form so that Ormiston makes an effective contribution to students' outcomes.

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

Samantha Morgan-Price
Her Majesty's Inspector