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Mr Schofield
Principal
The Wellington Academy
Tidworth Road
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Dear Mr Schofield

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of The Wellington Academy

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy on 1 and 2 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 and met with the principal, staff, a group of students and the Chair of the Governing Body who is also a representative of the sponsors.

Context

The academy opened in September 2009 in the buildings of the predecessor school, with the new Principal appointed a year in advance. After substantial turnover of staff in the first year of the academy, the current teaching staff includes 21 from the predecessor school and an additional 48 teachers newly appointed, of whom 15 are newly qualified. The senior leadership team and the roles of middle managers are now stable after some changes of personnel during the last year and reorganisation of roles.

The school roll has increased by 12% since the academy opened to 715 students. In 2009 about half of Year 11 students stayed on into the new sixth form which now

has 85 students. Nearly 40% of students at the academy are from military families stationed at the nearby garrison on Salisbury Plain. This means that the turnover of students is relatively high, with about a 10% change in the student population over the last academic year.

Most students are of White British heritage, with only about one in 12 from a minority ethnic background. No students are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. About one in four students has special educational needs and/or disabilities, which is above the national average. The proportion of these students with statement of special educational needs is below average. The academy has languages and business and enterprise specialist status.

A new academy building on the same site as the predecessor school, is due for completion and occupation in April 2011. A boarding house which will eventually accommodate 100 students is due to open with limited numbers in September 2011.

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

In the four terms since the academy opened, the Principal has relentlessly communicated to staff and students his vision of a positive, enabling culture for learning. This has generated high motivation and commitment in his team of staff and has encouraged students to believe they can succeed. These two factors plus the introduction of a new, creative curriculum and extensive intervention to support underachieving students, had a significant impact on the first set of GCSE results. Almost all students attained five A* to C grades and the proportion of students who gained five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, rose substantially and comfortably exceeded the national minimum expectation. However, students' attainment in English and mathematics was, nevertheless, low with students making more progress in English than mathematics. This represents good progress for these students in a short period; although students' attainment on entry to the academy was close to the national average, there was a substantial legacy of underachievement from previous years. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities made similar progress to their peers. However, the low proportion of A* and A grades indicates that the strategies used to raise the attainment of the majority did not have enough impact on the performance of those who are more able.

Current data show that the students in Year 11 are on track to maintain the strong GCSE performance at the higher grades across five or more subjects in 2011. In addition, the academy is on track to make further modest improvements in the proportion who gain C grades in mathematics and English among the five or more subjects. The school has introduced a system to track students' progress in other year groups. Although the information collected is robust, this is in the early stages

of implementation and there is insufficient information to identify trends in achievement.

The progress students make in lessons is strongly linked to the quality of teaching they receive. Where the teaching is lively and engaging, students make good progress, but in too many lessons teachers talk for too long and there is too little focus on the quality of students' learning. In these lessons progress is satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students are polite and respond well to the academy's ambitious ethos and to the expectation that they maintain high standards in their appearance and attitudes. Their behaviour is often good around the academy but in lessons, if the teaching is not inspiring, students may be passive and not engaged in learning or there may be some low level disruption because they are bored. Exclusions have dropped dramatically and are now very rare. Students say that the reason behaviour is improving is because teachers are more engaged with them, and are interested and committed to them doing well. Relationships across the school are good.

Students have a range of opportunities to make a positive contribution to the academy's development, for example in identifying environmental elements for the new buildings. They are active in the local community, for example this term they are preparing to perform with members of the local army base and the concert will be broadcast for troops who are in Afghanistan. A group of students were inspired to be more ambitious after a day working with students at the sponsor school where they took part in a variety of activities linked to their enterprise schemes. Students say they are finding school enjoyable and this is encouraging them to attend more regularly. Attendance has risen and so far this school year it is above average. There has also been a substantial decrease in the proportion of students who have high levels of absence.

The effectiveness of provision

The academy has transformed provision for its students through a re-organised system of pastoral and academic care which supports students very well. An interesting curriculum now meets the needs of students with a range of abilities and aspirations. Regular assessment and the tracking system help teachers quickly identify underachieving students in Years 10 and 11. Students' progress is then monitored to see how they respond to the intervention strategies provided to support them. This process had a very positive impact on results in Year 11 in 2010.

Although improving, the quality of teaching is variable across the academy. As a result of the new curriculum, lessons have been extended to 100 minutes. The best teaching is well planned with a variety of learning activities which sustain the pace of learning and engage students for the full time. Learning activities focus on

progressive steps which are explained clearly, so students know when they are successful. However when teaching is only satisfactory, planning identifies the tasks to be completed rather than the intended learning outcomes, lessons are often too dominated by the teacher and only limited opportunities are provided for students to work actively or independently. The pace of learning in these lessons is slower and students make less progress.

Where teaching is less effective, the available assessment information from a range of sources is not used to ensure that the work set meets the needs of individual students. More able students are not always challenged sufficiently. Strategies for individual students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are available but are not consistently applied in classrooms, and this limits the progress these students make. Students say that the quality and regularity of useful feedback, particularly through marking, is inconsistent across the academy. Without this they do not know that their effort is valued or what to do to improve. Opportunities for students to assess their own work are provided in the best lessons, but not all students have the vocabulary to allow them to reflect on their learning.

Procedures for pastoral care have been updated so that students are supported in year groups. Form tutors and heads of year groups have a good overview of their students and challenge individuals when they are attending poorly or are not working to their expected level. Additional support ensures students whose circumstances makes them potentially vulnerable, including looked after children, succeed at the academy. The new special educational needs coordinator is tackling shortcomings in systems for supporting vulnerable students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In particular, she is ensuring that the skills of a competent team of teaching assistants are used to the best advantage.

Rapid and radical changes to the curriculum, with the introduction of a wide range of vocational opportunities in addition to academic courses, have had a very positive impact on students' motivation and achievement. Students appreciate the increased profile of physical education, the range of opportunities both in lessons and for extra-curricular activities, and all now do a GCSE course in this subject. Although very few older students study a language, all students in Years 7 and 8 are now studying two languages as part of the school's developing specialist status. The new director of business and enterprise is starting to make links with the local community, and all Year 10 and 11 students study enterprise as a GCSE course.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

In the first four terms of the new academy a substantial challenge for the Principal has been securing a stable senior leadership team and ensuring that key leadership posts across the school were filled successfully. Even before this process was complete he had managed to galvanise high numbers of new staff with those from the predecessor school, into a functioning team. Many teachers from the predecessor school have taken on new roles. Staff understand the Principal's vision

for the academy, share it and recognise their part in making it a reality. They are aware of his high expectations and the staff charter developed with teachers before the academy opened makes these explicit.

The academy's senior leaders are aware that providing short-term intervention strategies to tackle the legacy of underachievement for students in Years 10 and 11 so they are successful at GCSE, will be necessary for some time. Ensuring long-term sustainable change in students' achievement, by improving the quality of teaching and learning, is now a priority. A particular focus is on the need to provide opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills so they take responsibility for their own learning and are well-prepared for sixth form study. A new senior leader has been appointed and the pace of professional development to develop teachers' skills is accelerating.

Middle managers, many of whom are new to post, value the autonomy they are given and the opportunity to meet and share ideas. Their efforts are strongly focused on further raising achievement at GCSE. Monitoring of provision within departments is delegated to middle managers but the quality is variable and systems are not yet sufficiently robust to ensure that the collection of information is consistently rigorous. As a result, improvement plans at department level lack clear success criteria and milestones and do not yet have a specific target to raise the quality of teaching and learning. The use of 30-day action plans for pastoral staff has ensured rapid progress in developing pastoral support since the start of the autumn term.

The governing body is absolutely committed to the growth of the academy and the principle of inclusion. Its membership includes representatives of the sponsor, the local community and parents. Governors are very supportive of the principal, and understanding of the barriers that he has successfully overcome to promote better progress for students. Much time and energy has been given to supporting the development of the new building and links to Wellington College, but less focus has been given to the quality of teaching and learning. Committees to monitor different aspects of the school's work are in the early stages of being established, so arrangements to ensure that the governing body meets its statutory responsibilities are not yet secure. Senior leaders at the academy have ensured that the single central register is complete and meets requirements.

External support

The academy is sponsored by Wellington College, a public school, which also has a military tradition. Links between the staff and students at the two schools have developed progressively since the academy opened. Good support for the high number of newly qualified teachers has been provided by the local authority. The academy has also successfully used expertise and financial support from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

The School Improvement Partner also acted as the National Challenge advisor for the predecessor school. His evaluation of the academy's progress is accurate and thorough.

Main Judgements

The academy has made outstanding progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to secure an increase in students' attainment and progress
- develop students' learning skills, so that they can work independently and have the vocabulary to discuss their learning
- ensure that monitoring by middle leaders is focused on the quality of students' learning, so that the information collected can be used to improve the quality of teaching.

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

Mary Massey

Her Majesty's Inspector

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