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Ms Anne Seneviratne
Principal
Outwood Academy Adwick
Windmill Balk Lane
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Dear Ms Seneviratne

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Outwood Academy Adwick

Introduction

Following my visit with John Young HMI to your academy on 11-12 January 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, the Chief Executive in his role as representative of the academy's sponsor, senior leaders, staff, groups of students and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Context

Outwood Academy Adwick opened in September 2009 on the site of the predecessor school. It is sponsored by Outwood Grange Academies Trust. Doncaster local authority acts as co-sponsor. During its first year the academy experienced significant reorganisation and changes to staffing. The academy has twin specialisms in sport and science.

The academy provides a comprehensive education for 1163 students, including 175 in the sixth form. The majority of students are White British and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. Around a quarter of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. Students' attainment on entry to Year 7 is below average.

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

The academy's first examination results, published in summer 2010, showed a significant rise in overall attainment. This reflects a much improved provision that better meets the needs of all groups of learners. The proportion of students achieving at least five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, increased compared to the 2009 results achieved by the predecessor school. The academy met its target for this key indicator of achievement and narrowed the attainment gap compared to the national average. Improvements in teaching are securing more rapid gains in students' learning.

Published results following the national examinations taken in November 2010, and received by the academy during this monitoring visit, show that students' progress in English and mathematics has accelerated. The attainment gap in both these subjects narrowed sharply. Sixth form achievements vary widely between subjects, although overall pass rates improved in 10 of the 13 subjects examined in 2010. Sixth form students who spoke with inspectors have plans for the next step in their lives and spoke positively about their sixth form experience. Younger students spoke enthusiastically about the extensive range of study options on offer. The strong emphasis placed on celebrating achievement is central to the academy's inclusive ethos and contributes well to the improving attitudes to learning.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour shows an improving trend. This is reflected in students' conduct in lessons and around the academy site. The great majority of students show care and consideration for others and for the academy's accommodation and resources. Students are generally polite to adults and visitors. They get on well with one another. Mixed-age grouping for some lessons is helping to develop relationships within the student community. The Consequences system has brought greater consistency to behaviour management, although the point at which teachers deem necessary the application of sanctions varies. Inspectors observed very occasional instances of unsatisfactory behaviour that disrupted learning. Nevertheless, exclusions are falling and punctuality is improving. Inspectors observed the vast majority of students arrive on time at the start of the day.

Attendance is improving and persistent absence is falling. Effective actions to promote attendance include a dedicated staff team and greater engagement with the parents and carers of students whose attendance is a cause for concern. For many students their improving attendance mirrors their greater enjoyment of school. Higher expectations and a better quality provision are promoting students' personal development well. Many of those who spoke with inspectors offered a mature reflection on their experiences of school. A greater sense of personal responsibility is evident in students' high standards of dress both in the main school and the sixth form.

Both specialist subjects make a good contribution to the improving picture of attainment. The well-being of many students is supported through the wide range of after-school sports clubs. Science courses in the sixth form make a notable contribution to supporting students' career aspirations in, for example, veterinary nursing, laboratory technician work and medicine.

The effectiveness of provision

Inspectors observed many examples of effective teaching that promoted learning well. Good relationships between staff and students are a feature in many classrooms. Teachers are gaining confidence in their use of technology to interest and engage students. Underpinning the improving quality of teaching is teachers' willingness to reflect on, and develop, their own practice. The majority of staff use agreed strategies appropriately to manage learning and behaviour.

In some lessons learning is satisfactory rather than good because students are still developing the skills needed to make the most of independent learning activities. Sometimes teachers do not facilitate collaborative learning activities well enough, or are reluctant to relinquish control and talk for too long. Opportunities to develop students' vocabulary, spelling and speaking skills are frequently missed. The academy has recognised this weakness and is in the early stages of introducing a literacy strategy. The high quality teaching and care that delivers the innovative Year 7 curriculum gets students' secondary education off to a flying start.

The use of assessment in lessons to check that students understand the work and to move their learning on is variable. Inspectors observed some very effective practice that offered good levels of challenge to students at different stages in their learning; this included skilled use of questioning that probed and encouraged thinking. These teaching strategies ensured good pace in lessons, promoted good gains in knowledge and understanding, and provided opportunities to apply this new learning. In other lessons teachers used these strategies less skilfully so that learning was only satisfactory.

The innovative new curriculum has been influential in raising students' aspirations and promoting their personal development. It has contributed much to improving

outcomes. The reintroduction of modern foreign languages is popular with younger students. Students in the extended Key Stage 4 are highly enthusiastic about the extensive choice of option courses that enable them to personalise their learning. Mixed-age groups on some courses give the flexibility for students to progress at their own pace as they develop individual talents and interests. Increased participation and improved retention post-16 demonstrate the impact of effective guidance and support at transition points and reflect increasing levels of student satisfaction.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The academy's leaders have raised expectations of students and staff. Staffing, and academy systems and structures, have settled following a period of considerable change. Staff are on board with the new ways of working and share their leaders' commitment to place the needs of individual learners at the heart of the academy's work. Roles and responsibilities are clearly understood. The academy's leaders have been willing to take risks in adopting different ways of working. Crucial to the academy's success has been thorough planning and careful monitoring and evaluation. The Principal and the academy's sponsor have an accurate view of the impact of actions taken so far. The messages senior leaders and curriculum managers derive from the systematic assessment and tracking of students' progress enable them to identify strengths and weaknesses and intervene where necessary.

Senior leaders celebrate the academy's achievements but are not complacent. Work to improve attendance and behaviour further is unrelenting. Inspectors found much evidence in lessons to demonstrate the impact of action taken to improve teaching. However, the academy's view of the quality of learning at this stage on its journey is more favourable than inspectors' observations suggest. The need to develop students' literacy skills and achieve greater consistency in both challenge and pace of learning is recognised. The academy has been successful in making and sustaining improvement and is well placed for this to continue.

External support

The expertise and experience provided by the Outwood Grange Academies Trust has been highly influential in building leadership capacity at Adwick. A comprehensive programme of professional development allows leaders at all levels to observe practice cross the Trust's family of academies and benefit from bespoke training and development. Staff spoke positively about their first-hand experiences. For example, curriculum leaders welcomed the specialist support their teams receive to ensure that assessment of students' work is accurate.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the emphasis on developing literacy across the curriculum by firmly embedding the literacy strategy as this develops.
- Ensure that all lessons promote good or better progress by:
 - achieving greater impact from the sharing of best practice
 - giving greater emphasis to the learning of individuals and groups in formal lesson observations and staff development activities.
- Maintain the strong focus on further improving behaviour and attendance.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chief Executive of the Outwood Grange Academies Trust, 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

Cathryn Kirby
Her Majesty's Inspector