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Steven Jewell
Principal
The Littlehampton Academy
Hill Road
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Dear Mr Jewell

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of The Littlehampton 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 the first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, governors, staff and students.

Context

The Littlehampton Academy opened in September 2009 in the same accommodation as its predecessor school; a building programme has just begun. The academy's specialisms are in business and enterprise, and in English.

There are currently 1677 students on roll; there are spare places in all year groups. The proportions of students from minority ethnic groups or with home languages other than English are small. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly above the national average. Few students leave the academy other than at the end of Years 11 or 13.

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

Students' attainment is beginning to rise. The academy's GCSE results were low in 2010, although results in English were broadly average, as was the proportion of students gaining five or more passes at grade G or above. Early analysis indicates that students taking examinations in 2010 made the overall progress expected of them given their low starting points and capabilities in Year 7. They achieved well in English, although they made much less progress in mathematics. Some students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities made less progress than other students. Early analysis of the 2010 A Level results indicates that Year 13 students made more progress than expected given their GCSE results at the end of Year 11.

Students were making satisfactory or better progress in the large majority of lessons observed during the inspection; they were making good progress in a small minority of lessons. Low levels of literacy are significant barriers to achievement for many students, particularly those in Key Stage 4.

Leaders track students' achievement carefully. The results of this tracking demonstrate that students are increasingly achieving more. Students currently in Year 11 identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities are making similar progress to other students. In an attempt to raise students' aspirations in the academy's first year, Year 9 students were given the opportunity to take a number of accredited vocational courses; as a result, the large majority of students currently in Year 10 have already achieved qualifications.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students are very positive about the new academy and the improvements that are being made. Most have good attitudes to learning, although some can be rather passive in lessons. Many students are articulate and speak confidently, although some, particularly those in Key Stage 4, are much more reticent. The vast majority behave well, although there is occasionally some minor misbehaviour when teaching is less effective. Attendance levels are below national averages.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching varies considerably. While some good teaching was observed during the inspection, most was satisfactory and a small amount inadequate. In the best lessons work is carefully matched to students' abilities, the activities are carefully selected to interest and challenge everyone, and the lesson moves along at a rapid pace. The academy's students respond enthusiastically to teaching like this. However, teachers' planning often takes too little account of the needs of students of different ability and few teachers make enough use of information about individual students' targets and current achievement when they plan. As a result,

many lessons do not challenge students sufficiently, particularly those of higher ability. The level of structure and support that teachers provide to students when they carry out individual or group activities is also sometimes inappropriate. In some cases activities are too structured and this limits students' progress. In other cases, students are given too little support and guidance, and therefore struggle to make progress with the task. The frequency of marking and the quality of teachers' comments also vary considerably.

Leaders monitor and review the curriculum carefully to ensure that it meets everyone's needs. Much good work has been done to develop the curriculum and further changes are planned for next September. Older students have access to a good mixture of vocational and more traditional courses.

Clear and effective procedures are in place to manage students' behaviour. A range of strategies is also in place to support improvements in attendance, but the absence rate remains persistently above average. The academy's specialisms are helping to support the academy's improvement in a number of ways; for example, all students in Key Stage 4 carry out a business and enterprise project, and a range of useful work is underway to develop students' writing across the curriculum.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The Principal and senior colleagues provide clear direction. They are very ambitious for the academy and drive improvement well, but are also realistic about the large amount that remains to be done. The academy is now divided into 'chapters', which combine oversight of a number of curriculum areas with pastoral responsibility for a group of students. This is supporting greater delegation and devolution of responsibility across the academy. While there was inevitable turbulence last year in the transition to academy status, things are much more settled now and changes are bedding down. Staff recognise this and their morale is good. Effective systems are in place to hold middle leaders to account, to develop their skills, and to help them to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their areas. However, senior leaders recognise that there is more to do if middle leaders are to play a full role in driving forward improvements in teaching.

Senior leaders monitor the academy's provision well. A wide range of monitoring is carried out on a three weekly cycle; results are analysed and discussed to inform priorities for the following three weeks. Although the system is fairly new and still bedding down, it is carefully structured and systematic. It provides very useful rigour and regularity to monitoring and short-term planning. The various medium- and longer-term plans for improvement are detailed and thorough; progress is monitored carefully.

Senior leaders recognise that their most important job is to improve the quality of teaching. Almost all of the lessons visited by inspectors were observed jointly with senior leaders. In each case, the leader was able to analyse and evaluate the lesson

in considerable detail. Some useful work has been done to develop and improve teaching, although more needs to be done to eliminate inadequate teaching and raise the overall quality. Leaders are also doing much to raise students' aspirations and expectations of themselves. For example, prominent boards around the academy list individual students' progress against their targets; this is a useful strategy.

The governing body has been constituted to include a wide range of experience and expertise; many members have an educational background. Good structures are in place to enable the governing body to hold leaders at all levels accountable for their performance.

All safeguarding procedures are in place and rigorously applied.

External support

Leaders are making effective use of external support to support improvement. The School Improvement Partner, in particular, is playing a very valuable role by providing intensive coaching in the mathematics department.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the overall quality of teaching and learning, in particular by ensuring that:
 - lessons provide sufficient challenge for students of all abilities
 - when students work on tasks individually or in groups, they are provided with a level of support and guidance that is appropriate to the activity and enables them to make rapid progress.
- Improve students' attendance.

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

Christopher Russell
Her Majesty's Inspector