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Mr M Emmerson
Principal
The City Academy, Hackney
Homerton Row
Hackney
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Dear Mr Emmerson

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of The City Academy, Hackney

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy with Gill Close HMI on Wednesday 19 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 student personal advisors, middle and senior leaders, two groups of students representing those in Years 7 and 8 and a representative of the sponsors.

Context

The academy opened in September 2009 in purpose built, award winning accommodation. About 90% of students live within 0.5 miles of the academy. On opening, the academy began to admit students from the beginning of Year 7 and now has 398 students in Years 7 and 8. Almost half of all students are known to be eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average. Almost a third of students have special educational needs, of these 20 have statements. A high proportion of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and many speak a first language other than English, although none are at the early stages of English language acquisition. The academy is fully representative of the rich diversity of cultural heritage in the local community.



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

At the beginning of Year 7, most students enter the academy with standards of attainment which are below average. The academy's assessment data indicate that standards have risen and that those students currently in Year 8 have reached standards which are above average for their age. The academy's tracking data, together with observations of students in lessons, indicate that they make outstanding progress overall and that they make the most progress in mathematics. A few of the most able students are not making as much progress as others in English and science. All significant groups of students do well, including those from different backgrounds and those entitled to free school meals. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make particularly good progress in English and mathematics because of the early identification of their learning needs and the very effective intervention strategies and classroom support.

The academy's specialisms of business and financial services have a significant impact in raising achievement, particularly in information and communication technology (ICT). This subject has strong and explicit links to the world of business and an expectation that students' work will reflect the professional and businesslike approach of the academy. The influence of the specialisms also permeate the life of the academy through its sharp focus on reinforcing high standards of professional conduct, dress and attitudes to work.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Staff, students and parents and carers share a strong commitment to the ethos and values of the academy. Staff and students speak about it with great enthusiasm and justified pride. The academy's expectations of students are high and consistent. Students are well supervised at all times and their behaviour is excellent. They enter the academy calmly and purposefully, settle quickly to their work and behave outstandingly well in lessons. Almost all students have very positive attitudes to learning and say they enjoy the wide range of opportunities the academy offers. They recognise the strength of teaching and the high quality care they receive which ensures their individual needs are well met. Students say they feel very safe in the academy, one remarked that it is 'the calmest place for miles!' They greatly appreciate the way all staff support and help them. Personal advisors, whether from the academy staff or volunteers from the sponsors, play a significant role in monitoring students' progress and well-being and are regularly available to advise them on academic and pastoral concerns. Students make good use of opportunities to start work early and the academy library, which opens at 7.30am, is a hive of early morning industry. Students have good social skills and enjoy working collaboratively. They are confident, eager to contribute to lessons and show good initiative and personal responsibility such as when students share their expertise in ICT with others who may be struggling. These positive attributes enable them to



make a strong contribution to the life of the academy and an increasingly positive contribution to the local community.

The academy's core values which emphasise achievement, enjoyment and respect are also having a positive impact on students' lives. Attendance is high for all groups of students and levels of persistent absence are low. In the academy's first year the number of students excluded was about 1.4% below the national average of 9.4% for similar schools. It has reduced further this year and is currently very low at 1.25%.

The effectiveness of provision

Students say they enjoy learning because the quality of teaching is good. Lesson observations confirm that the quality of teaching is good overall and much is outstanding. However, there remains some inconsistency, with the quality of teaching ranging from outstanding to inadequate. Key strengths of teaching include excellent subject knowledge, high expectations and very good use of time so that a brisk pace of learning is maintained throughout the lessons. In outstanding lessons teachers made excellent use of opportunities for students to discuss their emerging ideas and critically assess one another's work. In these lessons teachers used level descriptors very well so that students knew exactly how well they were doing and what they need to do reach the next level of attainment. In the best lessons there was a real sense of excitement and of the fun of learning. In weaker lessons students' were given insufficient opportunities to contribute to the lesson or to discuss their ideas, learning lacked a sense of fun and excitement and the pace was pedestrian. In all classes students were well motivated, had positive attitudes to learning and worked conscientiously, both independently and in groups. In most lessons teachers' planning is clear and detailed and identifies those students who may require additional support either in their development of basic skills or in particular subjects.

There are some excellent examples of marking, although the quality of marking is not consistent across all classes. Some of the best marking makes explicit reference to students' targets for improvement and to levels of attainment and tells students exactly what they need to do to improve. Less effective marking tells students when they have done well but doesn't provide guidance on how to improve further or tell them how well they are doing against their targets.

There is very good provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Their academic and pastoral needs are very well met through their involvement with personal advisors, mentors and in the classroom.

The curriculum is rich and varied, with a very good balance between teaching basic core skills and knowledge and providing for student's creative and artistic talents. The performing arts and sports make a valuable contribution to the life of the



academy and to its ethos. Sponsors provide particularly good support for curriculum enrichment activities such as developing student's musical talents and their approach to entrepreneurial projects such as the academy concierge service and the business conference project which is a commercial venture run by students.

Students receive excellent care, guidance and support. Each is recognised and valued as an individual, greeted by name at the beginning of lessons and extremely well guided and supported. Both the broad curriculum and the excellent guidance and support student receive make an important contribution to students' excellent progress.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The Principal's enthusiasm, quiet determination and clear vision have been fundamental to the development of the academy. He is well supported in his ambition for the academy to continue to improve by the senior leadership team, who play a key role in monitoring and improving key aspects of the academy's work, such as the quality of teaching and subject reviews. Middle leaders such as heads of department ensure there are effective subject evaluations and action plans which contribute to ongoing reviews of the whole academy self-evaluation. While the academy's self-evaluation is accurate and robust the monitoring of teaching would benefit from a sharper focus on the progress of groups of students and the identification and following up on subject specific areas for improvement. Leaders at all levels work together very effectively to realise the academy's vision of 'Values and Success'. The academy leadership and sponsors share an ambition to develop further links with the local community and build on the success of recent initiatives such as establishing a community orchard and the recent sustainability conference attended by a range of community groups. Because of its track record of raising standards, improving students' behaviour and encouraging very positive attitudes to work, the academy has an outstanding capacity to improve.

External support

The academy has greatly valued the support of the sponsors. Both KPMG and the City of London Corporation have provided advice, support and expertise which has improved provision, enhanced students' learning and provided valuable insights into the world of business. Reports from the school improvement partner provide useful monitoring of the progress of the academy and a good focus on improvement.

Main Judgements

The academy has made outstanding progress towards raising standards.



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

Robert Lovett
Her Majesty's Inspector

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