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Wednesday 6 October 2010

Anne O'Neill and Martin Campbell
Principals
Kettering Science Academy
Deeble Road
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Dear Anne O'Neill and Martin Campbell

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Kettering Science Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Paul Brooker HMI to your academy on Monday 4 and Tuesday 5 October 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 procedures for pupils, and met with the school principals, the executive principal, nominated staff, pupils and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Context

The academy provides education for pupils aged between four and 19. It opened in September 2009, the secondary phase using the premises of what was previously Ise Community College and the primary phase using the accommodation of what was previously Henry Gotch Primary School. The academy is sponsored by the Brooke Weston Partnership and has no religious designation. Its specialism is science. Work on the new secondary phase academy buildings is due to be completed by 2012.

There are currently 1428 pupils on roll, 406 in the primary phase including 107 in the Early Years Foundation Stage and 102 in the sixth form. The academy's catchment area is similar to that of its predecessor schools, although as the academy's popularity has risen, applications have come from a wider area. There are 6 pupils attending the designated special provision for speech, language and communication difficulties in the nursery. Pupils come from a range of different backgrounds. The majority are of White British heritage and the proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds is smaller than the national figure. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average, as is the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities including those with statements. The academy attracts pupils of all abilities, but, overall the pupils' attainment on entry into all phases is below average.

During the last year the same principal has remained in post for the primary phase but the secondary phase has been led by two different principals and during one term temporary leadership arrangements were put in place. The current principal in the secondary phase took up post at the start of the summer term 2010. There has been a significant turn over of staff across the two phases since becoming an academy. Previous vacancies in key posts (for example, in the mathematics department in the secondary phase) have been filled.

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

Attainment in all phases except the sixth form has improved since the academy opened, when compared with the two predecessor schools. However the academy recognises that attainment is still too low and below the national average at the end of each key stage.

Pupils start in the Early Years Foundation Stage achieving well below expected levels and they make good progress. At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage only writing and knowledge and understanding of the world remain below the level expected. Progress in Key Stage 1 is slower and attainment is below that expected by the end of the key stage. Girls in this key stage generally perform better than boys although the opposite is true for science. At the end of Key Stage 2 a larger proportion of pupils achieve expected levels or above in reading and mathematics than in the past. Similarly a higher proportion of pupils reach above expected levels in writing but there was a dip in the proportion of pupils reaching expected levels in this area in summer 2010. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds make similar progress. More pupils with special educational needs are also making progress at and above the expected rate than in the past although there are some who are not making as much progress and additional interventions have been introduced.

Lesson observations confirm that progress has accelerated in the primary phase. A more stimulating curriculum coupled with careful use of assessment and tracking have helped improve the quality of learning across this phase of the academy. Pupils make rapid progress when teachers have high expectations of their potential and

when lessons are planned and adapted from a good knowledge of what the pupils already know and can do.

In the secondary phase at Key Stage 3 attainment and progress have improved but not enough to reach the challenging targets set by the academy in English and mathematics. At Key Stage 4 a larger proportion of pupils gained five passes at A* - C overall and five passes at A* - C including English and mathematics at GCSE. There was also a 5% point increase in pupils gaining A* or A. Fewer pupils with special educational needs, particularly at School Action, are making the expected progress than proportions of pupils in other groups. In the sixth form progress made by pupils when compared with the predecessor school decreased last year.

In the lessons observed in the secondary phase the quality of learning was more variable than that in the primary phase. When lessons were engaging and based on careful analysis of assessment information, learning was of better quality. Similarly the teachers who were more skilled at questioning pupils to find out the pupils' different levels of understanding were more confident to adapt their planned lesson and secure better learning. Although tracking information demonstrates an increase in progress being made over time, learning observed across the curriculum was no better than satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils are enthusiastic about the academy in the primary phase and are eager to show visitors their work. They are keen to ensure the school council works effectively so that pupils can help the academy to continue to improve. Pupils usually behave in a considerate and supportive way to each other. Their behaviour in lessons was good and their enthusiasm helped them learn. In the Early Years Foundation Stage it was the first week this year when all the children were attending at the same time. They had settled well and were clear about the routines and this made a good contribution to their learning. Children were playing together, including children attending the designated special provision. Concerted efforts by the academy and support from parents have helped raise attendance so that in the primary phase it is in line with the national average. Pupils are motivated by the class challenge for attendance and the number of pupils who are persistently absent has decreased considerably.

In the secondary phase behaviour has also improved although last year there were still too many permanent and internal exclusions. During less structured times, which are staggered throughout the day, pupils behave more responsibly and react well to the trust being given so that classrooms and other internal areas of the academy are open to them. Pupils are friendly and welcoming and many spoke of the improvements in lessons since becoming an academy. They demonstrate pride in their school and the premises are generally well cared for and tidy. However, behaviour and engagement in lessons are in need of further improvement. Although

during the inspection, aggression or significant disruption were rare, pupils were not actively engaged in learning. Teachers often had to work hard to gain the pupils' interest and keep them motivated. In the less engaging lessons there was low-level disruption and many pupils were apathetic about their work. A large proportion of pupils receiving high numbers of internal and fixed-term exclusions have special educational needs and/or disabilities at the level of School Action Plus. Detailed recording of incidents and behaviour has enabled the academy to analyse all behaviour incidents. Interventions and support have been adapted as a result with well-placed emphasis on praise, rewards and consistency in sanctions. The new systems introduced at the start of this term are too recent to demonstrate any improved outcomes.

Attendance is still below average and has not improved significantly at the secondary phase or in the sixth form. The proportion of persistent absentees has decreased but still remains higher than the national average. Within this group however there are fewer pupils with extremely low levels of attendance. Pupils entitled to free school meals are over-represented in the group who attend less frequently.

Many pupils are keen to support improvements across the academy and this is exemplified by the success of the 'Heroes and buddies' programme where older secondary phase pupils have successfully supported and mentored younger pupils throughout the academy.

The effectiveness of provision

Across the academy teaching is variable. In the Early Years Foundation Stage and primary phases teaching is well planned using careful assessment information. Planning is detailed and ensures high expectations for progress while making sure the different levels at which pupils are working can be accommodated by the activities. There are clear links made across curriculum subjects that help to engage pupils and establish better understanding. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive and pupils are enthusiastic about their work. Pupils understand the learning objectives and are expected to work with and without direct adult support at different times throughout a lesson, they respond well to this expectation. In a few lessons the pupils' understanding of their work needs checking more frequently. There are times when questioning is too narrow and does not help assess a child's understanding well enough. The quality of learning also dips when the pace of the lesson is not suitable and pupils are in a larger group for too long.

Similar positive attributes are evident in the best lessons in the secondary phase but too few of the lessons observed had these features securely in place. Inconsistent planning and use of assessment meant that expectations were frequently too low or lacked precision to ensure they were at the right level for all pupils including those with special educational needs. There were some good examples where teachers had planned a range of activities that promoted more collaboration between pupils

or independent research and analysis. However too many lessons were dominated by low-level questioning from adults that did not enable pupils to articulate and elaborate on their thoughts. There were positive relationships between staff and pupils in the lessons observed but too many pupils lack enthusiasm for learning. Marking was more consistent in the primary phase than the secondary but across the academy there was too little follow up to ensure pupils were acting upon the recommendations of how to improve or rewarded if they did.

The introduction of the international primary curriculum has helped to motivate pupils and increase their engagement in lessons. The planning ensures the content of lessons helps to widen the horizons of pupils and increase their awareness from a national and international perspective. In the secondary phase the curriculum has undergone swift changes recently to enable a wider range of options particularly for pupils in Year 9 through to Year 11. The design of an alternative curriculum, although in the early stages, has helped pupils become more motivated and increased their chances of gaining accreditation at higher levels than in the past. The introduction of qualifications other than GCSE including BTEC has helped raise the level of expectations for many pupils. There is good take up of the additional curriculum available outside the usual academy day. This includes a wide variety of activities some of which also have accreditation opportunities. The science specialism has been used to support curriculum development in the primary phase as well as in other academies within the partnership. Science has helped other core subjects lead developments in assessment and tracking.

In the primary phase, including the Early Years Foundation Stage, assessment and tracking information is used extremely well. The pastoral system and any additional support are targeted appropriately and have helped to raise achievement although there are still some pupils with special educational needs who are not making the progress expected. Pupils in the secondary phase who have additional needs have received a range of support but this has not always been effective in helping them make the necessary improvements in behaviour, attendance or achievement. A new structure for academic and pastoral mentoring including a move to vertical tutor groups for all pupils in the secondary phase has been implemented. The emphasis on raising aspirations and achievement for all while making clear links between attendance, behaviour and achievement reflects good evaluation of the previous systems in place. This new structure has only just been introduced therefore there was no evidence of impact during the inspection.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

There is a clear drive for improvement from the academy's sponsors, governing body and senior leadership teams. Senior staff are passionate about the ability of all pupils to achieve more and have better choices and opportunities. This has helped to raise expectations of pupils and staff although these are not yet embedded consistently. The academy recognises the importance of teaching in improving all outcomes for

pupils in all phases and there are more regular monitoring and development opportunities for teaching staff. The primary phase has had a more consistent approach to this for longer than the secondary phase. The increase in levels of attainment throughout the academy, despite the disrupted year in the secondary phase, is testament to the capacity the academy has to improve further.

Throughout the academy improved monitoring arrangements including careful progress tracking have been established. These have been more consistently used in the primary phase but are increasingly being used across the curriculum in the secondary phase. Good, recent self-evaluation has informed developments and helped to sustain improvements in most phases. In the primary phase there is rigorous evaluation of provision in relation to the outcomes for the pupils. In the secondary phase recently introduced systems are designed to ensure the possibility of robust evaluation from the outcomes for the pupils.

Although there have been links across the phases with staff and pupils there has been less emphasis on developing the notion of an all-age academy. This is partly as a consequence of differing priorities between the two phases and the changes in leadership within the secondary phase. The support of the executive Principal and the Brooke Weston Partnership has enabled the principals to focus on improving teaching and learning and pastoral support within the academy. Structures and systems that are transferrable have been put in place and support for managing the premises and finances has released valuable leadership time to focus on developing the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning.

External support

The academy has not relied on external support because the Brooke Weston Partnership has good capacity to support its three academies and shape improvement. However, better links are developing with the local college and more with local schools. There are links with a range of partners including a local church to support key initiatives and involve the community.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Accelerate the progress that all groups of pupils make by replicating the best practice in lessons across the curriculum and in all phases by:
 - ensuring lesson plans are based on careful assessment and set ambitious outcomes for every pupil

- focusing on improving assessment within lessons so that activities can be adapted in response to the pupils' different levels of understanding
 - ensuring lessons actively engage all pupils in their learning and build quickly on previous progress
 - making more effective use of marking and assessment to ensure guidance is used by pupils to improve their work.
- Improve attendance and behaviour, particularly in the secondary phase and sixth form by:
- ensuring pastoral support responds swiftly to pupils' needs and circumstances and makes the links with levels of achievement clear
 - ensuring the curriculum is engaging and matches local need to improve choices and opportunities when pupils leave the academy.
- Raise expectations of all staff and pupils by:
- sharing best practice across the academy
 - using monitoring information to demonstrate the difference that improvements in provision and other outcomes make in raising achievement.

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

Janet Thompson
Her Majesty's Inspector

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