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Mr Glen Denham
Oasis Academy Shirley Park
Shirley Road
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Dear Mr Denham

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Oasis Academy Shirley Park

Introduction

Following my visit with Angela Corbett HMI to your academy on 15 and 16 March 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 and other senior leaders, including the head of primary phase, groups of students, groups of staff and two governors including the Chair of the Governing Body who is also the Director of Education of Oasis Academies.

Context

The academy opened in September 2009 for students aged 3 to 16. It replaced three schools, Ashburton Infants, Ashburton Junior and Ashburton Community School, the first two of which were in Ofsted categories of concern at that time. A large majority of staff transferred from the predecessor schools to the academy which now operates across three sites within walking distance of each other. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in the Children's Centre run by the academy for their Nursery year and in the primary section of the academy for their Reception year. The Children's Centre was not looked at as part of this inspection although a brief visit was made to the nursery. The academy is part of the Oasis group sponsored by the Oasis Community Learning Charity. It has specialisms

in English, enterprise and visual arts. The Principal has led the academy since it opened. The present head of primary phase is the seventh since September 2009. The academy plans to open a sixth form for 85 students in September 2011.

There are currently 1462 students at the academy, including 417 in the primary phase. The proportions of students from minority ethnic groups and of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals are both well above average. The proportion speaking English as an additional language is above average as is the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are many looked after children, more than is found typically, especially in the secondary phase.

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

The academy is very successfully boosting both attainment and progress in the secondary phase. For primary students, improvements have been barely satisfactory. The progress of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage was not explored fully on this visit. The extent to which students enjoy school life has improved greatly because an orderly atmosphere now exists in which students feel safe and where they know they are encouraged and supported to flourish.

The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, rose markedly in 2010 to 45% from 26% in the predecessor school. However, GCSE results in 2010 in English and mathematics, based on average point scores, were still significantly below the national average. While this gap is narrowing quickly and securely for English and mathematics this is not the case for science. The introduction of some vocational courses has enabled 94% of students to leave Year 11 with at least five good GCSE or equivalent grades; this is significantly above the national average. The 2010 results for the end of Key Stage 4 showed that students eligible for free school meals and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities generally made better progress than similar cohorts nationally. Students who started Year 7 with above average levels of attainment made broadly satisfactory progress but many others, especially those whose attainment in Year 7 was below average, made exceptionally good progress.

The speeding up of primary students' progress faltered in the academic year 2009–2010 mainly because of the many changes in leadership. There is still some way to go before the progress of primary students can be said to be at least adequate overall; progress in English and mathematics since September 2010 is not yet consistently satisfactory let alone good so as to catch up on past underachievement. In 2010, attainment at the end of Year 2 and at the end of Year 6 was low with considerably lower than average proportions of students reaching or exceeding nationally expected levels in English and mathematics. Roughly half of students leaving Year 6 in 2010 made expected or better progress and this is not enough. Secondary teachers recognise that reading skills are low for many students in Year 7

and are rightly seeking to lift these through a good range of intervention programmes.

Throughout the academy, students' speaking skills are generally weak. It is clear that staff in all phases are working to boost speaking skills but much more still needs to be done. The development of students' writing skills is good in places but patchy overall because opportunities are frequently missed to promote and apply them across the curriculum. Some polished work to show students' best writing across the curriculum was seen in the primary phase but less so in the secondary. Examples of high achievement exist in art, English literature and humanities.

Other relevant outcomes for students

The academy has very successfully secured a sound platform for learning and further improvements in that students show positive attitudes, arrive punctually to lessons and settle to work quickly. A sense of pride is clearly evident as is the desire to succeed. Students have much to say about the improvement in behaviour since the academy opened. They mention instances of poor behaviour that still occur occasionally, adding that staff manage them swiftly and well. Students concentrate well and work hard although, where tasks are not engaging, unclear or the pace is slow, some of them sit quietly and unobtrusively doing rather little, sometimes unnoticed. Attendance is improving but still low in places, especially in Year 10. It has been noticeably improved in the primary phase and for Year 11 students.

The effectiveness of provision

The considerable attention given to raising the quality of teaching and learning is bearing fruit in both the primary and secondary phases. The actions being taken are the right ones. Teaching seen on this visit was good or satisfactory, predominantly good, but was it also occasionally inadequate in the primary phase. Lessons are conducted in an orderly atmosphere. Relationships between staff and students are positive. Teachers have good subject knowledge and generally plan activities that meet students' needs; in some lessons, however, this is not the case and students find the work too easy, too hard or unclear. The effective use of assessment to promote learning is further advanced in the secondary phase than in the primary. Not all teachers have developed fully enough their detective skills in discerning exactly what students already know, what they have learned in a lesson and where gaps exist in their knowledge, skills or understanding. Many teachers were seen giving students good verbal feedback on their work. Teachers' marking, however, is inconsistent in pointing out errors and following up to check on improvements both in writing and subject knowledge. Some good examples were seen across the curriculum of teachers developing students' skills in literacy, such as checking on the correct use of subject specific vocabulary, asking students to present their ideas or to read out loud in front of the class but such examples or other strategies were relatively rarely used. Some good use of information and communication technology

was also seen but, again, not frequently. In the secondary phase, not all teachers make the best use of the 100 minute lessons and some lessons lack good pace.

Although provision and outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage were not explored fully on this visit, inspectors raise no concerns about this stage. Moreover, several aspects are worthy of praise, including the spacious accommodation and the diversity of activities available to foster all areas of learning. Many supportive interactions by staff were observed as they encouraged children to explore and learn. Some delightful singing was heard.

The curriculum is developing well with strengths in the identification of students' special educational needs and/or disabilities and in the way in which provision is adapted to meet them, sometimes through intervention programmes. Another positive feature is in the way students are being encouraged to build their learning power so as to increase independence. The curriculum supports well and in many ways students' personal development. In the secondary phase, BTEC courses have been introduced to meet more closely some students' needs. Students in Year 9 have the opportunity to take at least one GCSE examination. Good use is made of progress mentor time. The impact of the academy's specialisms on raising students' achievements is currently no better than satisfactory. Literacy and numeracy are not yet being promoted as much as they should be across the curriculum.

Strengths exist in the care, guidance and support provided for students who speak in praise of it. Students who join speaking English as an additional language are supported quickly to settle and access lessons. Those whose circumstances make them vulnerable are known and kept closely under review. Behaviour management is clearly visible but undertaken cordially; inspectors heard not a single raised voice over their two day visit. Arrangements for safeguarding students meet requirements.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

Vision and ambition are high and clearly communicated. Strong leadership and management exist in many respects, especially in the senior leadership team and in governance. The local community has increased its confidence in the academy as seen in the rising numbers of applications for places, for example. Problems in securing effective leadership for the primary phase contributed to the lack of progress in improving it quickly. Since September 2010, the head of primary phase has set high expectations of work and behaviour with a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning, though improvements in it are still necessary. The academy's plans to open a sixth form are sound although there may be a pressure on accommodation as numbers grow in the second year and beyond.

The management of learning and teaching has some good features, in the work of the directors of learning and teaching in both phases, for example, and in the strategies to support professional development. Senior staff are generally accurate in

their evaluations of the quality of lessons and of other aspects of the academy's work and effectiveness. Middle managers are involved in evaluation although, in some cases, a greater focus is placed on the quality of provision than on the quality of outcomes for students. Also, where comments are made by them about improving teaching, these are mostly given without specific detail.

The academy has good capacity to improve. Good systems exist through which students' achievements are kept under review. Work to promote community cohesion within the academy has been undertaken with clear signs of success. Plans for improvement are good and being implemented.

External support

The academy benefits from the support of the Oasis group of academies in matters of administration, and in the sharing of ideas and expertise through meetings of Oasis Academy Principals and in other professional development activities. Support from London Challenge and Education London has been valued as has the support of the Croydon East Cluster Extended Schools. The academy staff also value the guidance from the School Improvement Partner and from other consultants.

Main Judgements

The academy has very successfully improved outcomes in the secondary phase but, in view of the limited progress in the primary phase, the academy's overall progress towards raising standards is no better than satisfactory.

Priorities for further improvement

The academy should:

- as a matter of urgency, speed up progress and hence raise attainment in the primary phase, especially in writing and mathematics
- improve the quality of learning and teaching by enhancing teachers' skills in determining exactly what students already know and have learned in a lesson through good questioning and others means, and in using this information to plan appropriate activities
- raise standards in numeracy, literacy and oracy by:
 - increasing the opportunities for students to apply mathematical skills and to write at length in a range of contexts and in subjects across the curriculum, to speak in various settings, offer their ideas, explain their approaches and present their work
 - strengthening approaches to marking so as to improve the quality of students' written work, spelling and presentation

- increasing the number of occasions when students produce written and other work to a polished best.

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

Wiola Hola
Her Majesty's Inspector