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Mr A Hemmings
The Bushey Academy
London Road
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Dear Mr Hemmings

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of The Bushey Academy

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy with Mark Phillips HMI on 28 and 29 September 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 and met with the principal, senior staff, groups of students and the chair of the governing body.

Context

The Bushey Academy opened in the buildings of the predecessor school, Bushey Hall School, in September 2009. The lead sponsor is Mr David Meller and the Sir John Lawes School was originally a co-sponsor, having worked as a partner with the predecessor school. The Sir John Lawes school has subsequently resigned this role after advice from the Department for Education but continues to work in partnership with the academy. The deputy headteacher of the predecessor school became the principal and almost all staff transferred to the academy. At the end of the first year of the academy, about 20% of these teachers left, including two senior leaders. The academy has successfully recruited replacements, including four teachers in the Teach First scheme. At Easter 2011, the academy will move into temporary accommodation while its new buildings are developed for opening in September 2012. Admissions to Year 7 in the first two years of the academy are higher than in

the predecessor school and the profile of attainment on entry is also rising. The academy is smaller than the average nationally and this is particularly so for the sixth form. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average but for those with a statement of special educational needs it is below average. Around a third of students are from minority ethnic groups and an increasing number speak English as an additional language. The number of students joining or leaving the academy during the school year is reducing.

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is improving. The provisional results for Year 11 students in 2010 indicate a substantial rise in the proportion achieving at least five GCSE grades A* to C and A* to G. These are now closer to the average nationally. The proportion achieving five higher grades including English and mathematics also increased, although it has not yet reached the National Challenge target of 30%. Results in science improved markedly. Analysis by academy leaders indicates that Year 11 students met some of the challenging targets set for them and made broadly expected progress. Students from minority ethnic groups made at least similar progress to their peers. Those Year 11 students known to be eligible for free school meals made similar progress to the rest of Year 11 when English and mathematics are taken into account. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities generally made less progress than their peers. There is some indication of underperformance by boys in English and girls in mathematics.

The academy has developed an effective system to collate assessment information regularly and analyse it thoroughly. This indicates that current Year 11 students are on track to surpass the results achieved in 2010. Year 7 students appear to have made good progress in the first year of the academy with Year 8 also making better than expected progress. However, teacher assessments for Year 9 in summer 2010 reveal attainment that is well below that expected nationally, especially in English. The academy's regular monitoring of students' progress provides an efficient basis for reviewing any underperformance, identifying those requiring intervention and shaping the strategies to help students reach their targets. The academy has developed a well organised programme of individual support and small group tuition. Staff set challenging individual and collective targets for students based on matching or exceeding the progress expected of the top 25% of schools. These steps have ensured that the academy is in a position to act promptly to raise achievement.

In the 20 lessons observed during the inspection, students made satisfactory progress. In over a third of the lessons they made good progress. They generally show positive attitudes to learning and settle to work well. They collaborate effectively in pairs and small groups. They also enjoy challenge and the opportunity

to work practically and learn by being active. Most try hard, especially when teachers encourage them to be independent and to develop their ideas and responses.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The academy's records, inspectors' observations, and the views of staff and students all confirm that behaviour has improved significantly since September 2009. The number of exclusions over the past year was broadly average, markedly lower than in the final year of the predecessor school. Behaviour in lessons and around the school site is generally calm and well-ordered. Students attribute this improvement to the positive ethos promoted by senior leaders, the new vertical tutoring system that encourages older students to act as mentors and role-models, and, not least, the smart new uniform. As one student told inspectors, 'proud to belong' is more than just a motto – I'm genuinely proud to be part of the academy, and that wasn't the case before". However, senior leaders recognise that there is more to do before behaviour consistently and effectively supports learning. There are still lessons where students do not have sufficient opportunities to work independently, without the direct supervision of adults. There is also a small minority of lessons that fail to engage students sufficiently. In these lessons, students' attention drifts and they engage in low-level talking.

Students say that they feel safe in the academy and report that any concerns are dealt with promptly. They also record that the vertical tutor groups have improved relationships between students of different ages and promoted the sense of community in the academy. At the time of the inspection, major procedures for the safeguarding of students were in place, including the careful scrutiny of adults' suitability to work with young people.

Attendance, too, has improved since the academy was opened, though not as rapidly or continuously as behaviour. There are still issues with some persistently absent students despite the best attempts of academy staff to resolve problems, and Year 11, where attendance is lower than for the rest of the academy. However, attendance figures for the current term are in line with national averages.

The effectiveness of provision

The majority of the lessons observed were satisfactory and over a third were judged good or outstanding. The quality of teaching overall is improving because of effective strategies to support and challenge teachers through regular observations and focused training. Although there are some consistent and developing strengths, there are also areas of inconsistency. Most teachers plan thoroughly and set clear objectives for learning. Lessons are structured well. Teachers use interactive white boards effectively to gain students' interest and organise learning. However, although there are examples of effective practice, there is inconsistency in the pace and challenge of lessons, teachers' use of questions to develop students' ideas and

the setting of work to cater precisely for the differing needs of students. Too often all students complete the same work despite differing levels of attainment and understanding. The use of assessment also varies too much in quality, including peer and self assessment with students and the helpfulness of teachers' comments on students' work. The academy has established a rigorous process for observing and evaluating the quality of teaching. This process identifies accurately the areas for further development and this has been followed up by effective training for staff with the assistance of the partner school and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

The academy has worked hard to offer a broad range of courses which meet the needs and interests of students in Key Stages 3 and 4. These include separate pathways that lead to different combinations of subjects, for example triple GCSE or vocational science options, the latter introduced in January 2010. The academy's business and communication specialism has an increasingly central place in the curriculum in both key stages and is providing models of effective teaching, for example in drama and art. There is good curriculum provision for physical education, with all students taking a certificated course in Key Stage 4. In Key Stage 3, there is additional curriculum time for English in Years 7 and 8, a sign of the academy's determination to raise literacy standards. However, there is some way to go before the provision of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum is sufficiently effective to improve achievement. Similarly, while there is a good range of extra-curricular activities for students to enjoy, senior leaders do not yet have a full understanding of the participation rates and success of different groups in these activities.

The new support system, managed by four heads of house, has played an important role in improving attendance and behaviour. Alongside the academy's system to monitor students' progress, staff have good knowledge about every individual and are well placed to intervene or liaise effectively with parents. The academy has identified the need to revise the structures for supporting students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and has acted promptly. However, these systems are not yet sufficiently well-developed and, in particular, the effectiveness of support for these students in lessons is inconsistent because teachers' planning does not always match work precisely enough to students' capabilities.

Sixth Form

The personal development of students in the small sixth form is good. Their attendance is above average; they show positive attitudes to learning and take a full part in academy life. A particularly successful development is their involvement in the new vertical tutoring system, where they act as effective role models and mentors to younger students. However, the academy's senior leaders recognise that there are serious concerns about the standards achieved by students in their examinations, particularly in last year's AS courses where too many subject areas failed to achieve their predicted results. The academy also recognises that there has

been insufficient monitoring of teaching and learning in sixth form lessons, and that the sixth form curriculum, support, guidance and monitoring systems are not sufficiently effective to ensure that students make good progress and achieve well.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The academy is led effectively by the principal and senior staff. They set a clear direction and have successfully established staff and student commitment to the academy. The motto 'proud to belong' is widely accepted by students who talk positively of the greater involvement they have in shaping issues, for example revising the uniform. The academy has devised a clear and relevant action plan which identifies accurately the key areas for development and sets challenging targets for improvement. This clear sense of direction has the support of staff and is central to the significant change in the academy's ethos and climate for learning. The senior leadership team has clear roles and is well-structured. Its expertise has been carefully considered and relevant appointments made, some of which are relatively recent. Senior leadership has been further enhanced by the extension of strategic roles to middle leaders, such as the zone directors who oversee two or more subjects. All leaders are strongly focused on improving achievement and outcomes for students and raising aspirations. The first year of the academy has demonstrated improvements in many of these areas and confirms its capacity to improve further.

Senior staff and the governing body know the developing strengths and weaknesses of the academy. This is strongly supported by the effective cycle of activities to monitor performance and evaluate progress which has been consolidated in its first year. Middle leaders are actively engaged in this process and report to senior leaders on a regular basis, constantly refining areas for action. Middle leaders say that morale is high and they feel a growing sense of contribution to the overall direction of the academy. The development of non-teaching heads of house has improved communication with parents and students and is valued by them, especially in resolving any problems.

The governing body and the Trust Board are precisely constituted and have clear and complementary roles. They benefit from some shared membership. The work of the governing body is well-organised and businesslike. The Chair of the Governing Body has a very clear understanding of the role, and the strengths and areas for development of the academy. The minutes of the governing body demonstrate that there is regular review of data and performance information leading to searching questioning.

External support

The academy receives effective and continuing support from its partner school in relation to refining the quality of teaching and moderating assessments. The

headteacher of the partner school contributes strongly through her role as chair of the governing body and member of the Trust Board. The academy also benefits from partnership with a local school in the provision of sixth form courses and with a local academy in sharing leadership expertise. The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust has provided useful training to middle leaders in evaluating teaching and to teaching assistants on effective support in lessons. The National Challenge Adviser scrutinises the academy's performance closely and challenges the evidence in their self-evaluation, ensuring that the drive to raise standards is maintained.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the rates of progress of students in English and mathematics to beyond those expected nationally and ensure that any patterns of underperformance by gender are accurately analysed, acted upon and improved by September 2011.
- Improve the consistency of the quality of teaching, especially in setting pace and challenge in lessons, matching work precisely to students' varying needs and ensuring that all students develop the confidence to work independently.
- Consolidate teachers' use of assessment so that it is uniformly good by improving the precision and range of teachers' questioning, the use of peer and self assessment with students and the quality and helpfulness of marking and comments on students' work.
- Urgently improve attainment and progress in the sixth form by ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning is at least good in all lessons. Improve the guidance provided to students and the matching of their qualifications and interests to relevant courses to support successful completion.

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

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector