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Mr T Waterworth
All Saints Academy Dunstable
Houghton Road
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Dear Mr Waterworth

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of All Saints Academy Dunstable

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy with Robert Lovett HMI on Wednesday 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 and his senior staff, groups of pupils, the Diocesan of Education and Governors, and representatives of the sponsors.

Context

The principal designate was appointed in April 2009. The academy opened on 1 September 2009 in the buildings of its predecessor school. The following staff took up their appointments at the start of the academy's first academic year: a vice principal; the head of communications; the head of creating and designing; and the head of Key Stage 5. Four advanced skills teachers were appointed to work in; science, business and information technology, mathematics, and communications. Two key non-teaching staff were appointed as head of Key Stage 4 and head of student services.

The academy is smaller than average and the number of students known to be eligible for free school meals are above the national average. The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below the national average although the proportion of those students whose first language is not English is inline with the national figures.

The proportion of students registered by the academy as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national figure, although the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is below the national average. There are a small number of children in the academy who are looked-after by the local authority.

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

The provisional outcomes of the 2010 public examinations are notably more positive than those secured by the predecessor school. The proportion of students securing 5A* to C grades at GCSE, improved by 22 points to 58%, a position just below the national figure.

Similarly, the proportion of students securing five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics improved but remains significantly below the national average. A useful indication of the improvement in standards is evident in the average points scored in all examinations; this rose by 68 to a point just below the national average.

Provisional calculations compiled by the local authority indicate that the 2010 educational value added is likely to be significantly above the national average; a notable improvement against the outcomes secured by the predecessor school

The academy is developing an extensive evidence base derived from internally moderated assessments, supported by standardised tests and GCSE results already secured as part of an early entry programme. For example, 86% of the current Year 10 students have already secured a good GCSE pass in information and communication technology. A number of high achieving students currently in Year 9 took their mathematics GCSE whilst still in their middle school.

Learning and progress were found to be good or better in 24 of the 39 lessons seen by inspectors. Standards are rising where teachers are addressing the students' weaknesses in subject-based literacy or the misconceptions they have acquired in their prior learning. Learning is strongest where teachers use the assessment data effectively and focus the lesson on what the students are expected to learn.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students say that one of the key features of the academy is the good and improving behaviour of their peers. They note that the academy has high expectations and is developing an ethos which values personal responsibility. As a result, they feel very safe in the academy and most look forward to attending. Students move around the building, including the stairs, calmly, sensibly and considerately. Break times are similarly calm and orderly. Students talk, play and continue to learn together with mutual respect and tolerance. Students are very proud of the improvements the academy has made and pleased at the impact these have had on their learning and their daily lives. They say that as behaviour improves and standards rise, the academy is increasingly valued by the local community.

While attendance remains low it is beginning to rise. The academy has been particularly successful in reducing the number of students who are persistent absentees. Those students, who are most vulnerable, receive targeted support through the student support team and the family support worker. Punctuality is improving and strategies to encourage students to arrive on time in the morning and for their lessons are successful. These include the high profile of senior members of staff at the beginning of the day and 'meet and greet' by teachers at the start of many lessons.

While the academy tracks the progress of students with care, this valuable information is not used consistently well in lessons. While information on how well students are doing is generally used to inform planning and differentiate learning to meet students' differing needs, planning does not always have sufficient impact on practice. In the best lessons teachers use a range of carefully targeted questions to assess learning, challenge assumptions and ensure all students are fully engaged. Many students know what level they are working at and what their target is but fewer know what they need to do to improve. In an outstanding information and communication technology lesson, sixth form students knew the exact level at which they were working and what they needed to do to improve. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well-supported and make similar progress to others; however, planned interventions do not always materialise. The academy provides useful and readily accessible information for staff about the learning needs of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and a range of strategies to support them.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching and learning observed during the inspection was good or better in six out of ten lessons seen. In an outstanding citizenship/ personal and social education lesson, a vibrant discussion on capital punishment was facilitated and inspired by the teacher's well-timed and carefully directed questions. Students

listened to their peers' views respectfully and were prepared to contribute their own contradictory or supportive points in a mature manner.

Where the quality of teaching and learning was good, teachers often showed good subject knowledge; high quality questions required students to reflect upon their own learning in order to provide accurate responses. Such sessions were well-managed, often providing a drip feed of challenging ideas and tasks. Less dynamic lessons provided satisfactory learning experiences but opportunities were sometimes missed to extend the nature of the challenge provided or enhance the pace of the lesson. These lessons often failed to make the best use of the assessment data available to plan an engaging experience. Two lessons were judged inadequate.

The curriculum is appropriately broad and balanced, offering a range of academic and vocational courses. The academy has broadened curriculum choice at GCSE by removing the blocking of subjects on the timetable and allowing students greater freedom of choice. Students value the work-based learning available to them through the partnership with Vauxhall. While the place of the academy's two subject specialisms has been strengthened, it is too early to see the impact of these on achievement across the wider curriculum.

Students are well-cared for and feel valued by the academy. As a result, relationships across the academy are good. A member of the student leadership team said that respect between staff and students and between students is the norm and leads to a positive and supportive learning environment. Transition arrangements from Year 8 to Year 9 are carefully planned and the links with local middle schools is greatly valued by students. One Year 9 student said he 'felt part of the academy even before he started'. He went on to say that 'the academy offered a warm welcome in September' and that 'the good range of introductory activities helped him settle quickly into life in a new school'.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

A well-organised and efficiently managed leadership team has secured the smooth transfer from the predecessor school and enhanced provision. Considerable attention has been given to securing good behaviour and this has been a notable success. The academy's safeguarding arrangements included much that is considered good practice and met current government requirements. Leaders recognise that further work is required to improve attendance.

The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is comprehensive and accurate. Senior staff were invited to join inspectors in the joint observation of teaching and learning. The views expressed by senior colleagues during a formal review of this exercise concurred with the judgements given by inspectors.

The leadership team is both hard working and reflective, demonstrating an increasing ability to bring pedagogical insights to the enhancement of provision.

Important steps have been taken to improve all aspects of provision. In the two terms prior to the 2010 public examinations, significant progress was made and this is evident in the improved results obtained. Leaders and managers at all levels have accepted the new ambition and inspirational ethos being driven forward by senior staff. The governing body and the academy's sponsors strongly support the need to improve provision for the community at large; work on the promised new buildings are due to start in early October 2010.

External support

Senior staff have found the support of both sponsors particularly helpful. Bedfordshire University have helped with developments in mathematics and teacher training and the Diocese of St Albans has helped with the community and local government dimensions of the academy's development. The Principal was very positive about the work of the Chaplain on community and pastoral matters.

Training and support from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust has been important to the development of middle leaders and the work of the School Improvement Advisor has been a positive influence.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Enhance the proportion of lessons where challenging questions and engaging tasks are focused on subject specific literacy skills to inspire new learning.
- Improve attendance.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education of the Diocese of St Albans and the University of Bedfordshire as co-sponsors and the Academies Group at the Department for Education. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

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