

PROTECT-INSPECTION

CfBT Inspection Services T 0300 1231231
Suite 22 enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
West Lancs Investment Centre www.ofsted.gov.uk
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

Direct T 01695 566 852
Direct F 01695 729320
chuxley@cfbt.com
www.cfbt-inspections.com



06 May 2011

Mr C Bell
Principal
South Leeds Academy
Old Run Road
Leeds
LS10 2JU

Dear Mr Bell,

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to South Leeds Academy

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy with Margaret Farrow HMI on 5 May 2011, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents, had a telephone conversation with the School Improvement Partner and met with the Principal, members of the senior leadership team, groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the Trust. They also observed 17 lessons with different teachers and visited the off-site inclusion unit and the behaviour support room.

Context

The Principal was the headteacher of the predecessor school and many of the senior team were also at the predecessor school as senior leaders. There has been a change of Vice Principal since the academy opened. An Associate Principal, working on behalf of the sponsors, is currently supporting the senior leadership team. She was a senior leader at Garforth Academy, the partner school. The turnover of staff is low but the academy is in the middle of a managed staff reduction which is being achieved without compulsory redundancies. The academy is sponsored by the School Partnership Trust.

The academy has 1126 students on roll, including 106 in the sixth form. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is almost three times the national average. The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average but few have a statement of special educational needs. More students than average are from minority ethnic groups and the proportion of students whose first

January 2011

PROTECT-INSPECTION



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

language is not English is almost twice the average. Over 60 students, mainly of Gypsy Roma heritage, have recently joined the academy from the Czech Republic. The academy has specialisms in applied learning and English.

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

Students' prior attainment is low and examination results at the end of Key Stage 4 are below average but they improved considerably in 2010. The proportion of students obtaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C increased by 10%, narrowing the gap to the national average. The proportion of students obtaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, almost doubled. Nonetheless, the progress made across Key Stages 3 and 4 by last year's Year 11 students, was not as good as that made by similar students nationally. One group, those students with additional needs deemed to require support at the School Action level, made particularly poor progress. This reflects the legacy of weak provision in the predecessor school and the academy is deploying a wide range of well-targeted intervention strategies to address the deficit. Internal data and early external examination results suggest a further but more modest rise in the attainment of Year 11 this year, with a generally weaker cohort of students. There is evidence that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including School Action students, are making better progress this year. The improving quality of provision is having a positive impact on attainment and progress in Key Stage 3.

Alternative provision for students at risk of becoming disaffected has been strengthened enabling all students to gain accreditation, including qualifications in English and mathematics. All the Year 11 students in the alternative provision have found places on training courses or employment. Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory and improving. The number of students staying on post-16 is growing quickly and sixth formers are acting as role models for younger students, helping to raise aspirations. Progression rates from the sixth form to higher and further education are high. In the lessons observed, students made at least satisfactory progress and they say that they enjoy learning much more because teaching has improved and they are not distracted by poor behaviour.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students' behaviour has improved markedly. Older students confirm that behaviour is much better, both in and out of lessons. The behaviour seen in lessons was generally good and most teachers used behaviour management strategies well. Students say that the behaviour strategies ensure more fairness and provide more clarity for teachers and students. Break and lunchtimes are supervised well and students behave appropriately. Occasional instances of bullying are dealt with quickly once an adult is informed. Permanent exclusions are rare and the academy welcomes a high proportion of students excluded from other schools. The proportion of fixed-term exclusions has reduced considerably but is still well above average. Students from very diverse communities and different age groups mix well together which was not always the case in the predecessor school.

Attendance is improving but remains very low. The academy is tenacious in its drive to reduce the absence rate and is using a range of strategies to encourage students to attend, including competitions and prizes, intensive work with families and prosecution where necessary. Persistent absence rates are reducing and attendance rates in Years 7 and 8 are better than in other year groups.

The effectiveness of provision

The academy has worked hard to ensure that almost all teaching is at least satisfactory. However, there is not enough good teaching. Teachers have good working relationships with students and behaviour management strategies are used well in most lessons. Teachers prepare their lessons carefully but are not making sufficient use of the available assessment data to plan activities that match the differing abilities within the group. This means that the most able students are not always sufficiently stretched and lower ability students lose interest in work that is too difficult. Self- and peer-assessment are beginning to be used to enhance learning and there are examples of very effective marking but the quality of written feedback given to students is too variable.

The curriculum has been strengthened. The applied learning specialism has been used to introduce a wide range of vocational courses in Key Stage 4 that are engaging students and helping them to gain the qualifications needed to progress. The Key Stage 3 curriculum has also been improved allowing more time for literacy development where appropriate. However, the English specialism has had less impact and opportunities to develop literacy across the curriculum are being missed. By working in partnership with Garforth Academy, the academy is able to offer a wide range of academic and vocational courses in the sixth form, at both intermediate and advanced level. Many students participate in and enjoy the good variety of extra-curricular activities available.

Students experiencing significant challenges in their lives receive effective support that is enhanced by strong multi-agency working. Students say the support of their mentors is especially valuable. The inclusion unit provides an effective and supportive learning environment for students who would have been excluded in the past.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The Principal and senior leaders have worked hard and successfully to build the confidence and morale of staff. Deep divisions within the predecessor school that impeded development no longer exist and the senior leadership team itself is much more cohesive. Students are achieving better outcomes as a result of a more tailored and appropriate curriculum, more accurate monitoring of progress and better behaviour management. Data systems are much more robust but leaders recognise the need for further refinement. Tracking data are used well to monitor students' progress but are not used as effectively to plan lessons. A small number of teachers do not have sufficient understanding of the data.

The Trust provides central services such as finance and human resources. This support has enabled leaders to start addressing the high rate of staff absence and to improve the financial health of the academy. It has also given them time to focus on the key priorities of raising standards and improving teaching. Performance management is becoming increasingly robust but further tightening is still needed. Not all middle managers are effective in monitoring the work of their teams and have not always been held to account but weaknesses in middle leadership are currently being tackled. Senior leaders and the governing body have a good understanding of the academy's strengths and areas for improvement but there is a greater need to measure themselves against national expectations and benchmarks. Capacity for improvement is satisfactory.

External support

The academy is receiving excellent support from the Trust and especially from its partner school, Garforth Academy, which is helping build capacity in all areas of the academy's work. Senior leaders especially are benefitting from the networking and training opportunities offered by the Trust. The School Improvement Partner gives valuable support and provides accurate and timely progress checks against national expectations.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise achievement by:
 - increasing the proportion of good or better teaching
 - using assessment data to plan learning activities that meet the needs of everyone in the class
 - taking opportunities to develop students' literacy skills in every area of the curriculum.

- Increase the rate at which attendance is improving.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Group at the Department for Children, Schools and Families. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jan Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector

