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26 May 2011

Mr Harris
Nottingham University Samworth Academy
Bramhall Road
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Nottingham
NG8 4HY

Dear Mr Harris

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Nottingham University Samworth Academy

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy on 24 and 25 May 2011 with Kevin Sheldrick HMI, 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 25 part lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal and Vice Principal and Assistant Principals, a group of students and the Chair of the Governing Body. No lessons in Years 11 to 13 were observed because of the timetable.

Context

The academy opened in September 2009 in the predecessor school building. The academy is jointly sponsored by Nottingham University and Sir David Samworth. The links with the university give the academy a focus on research. For example, approximately a third of staff have taken on either a masters or PhD course. The Principal took up post in spring 2008 working at the university with both sponsors.

Just over 40% of students are known to be eligible for free school meals which is well above the national average. Most students are White British. The proportion of

students who have been identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above the national average.

The academy has two specialisms: health and science. Since September 2010, the academy became the designated deaf provision for the city of Nottingham. The provision will eventually cater for 15 deaf students.

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

The 2010 Year 11 examination results in 2010 were a disappointment for the academy. The proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C at GCSE was significantly below the national average. The proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C at GCSE including English and mathematics was also significantly below the national average and, at 21%, failed to meet the government's floor target of 35%. Attainment for this year group was low. Progress for just under half of the students in this cohort was inadequate, especially so for White British boys known to be eligible for free school meals. Students' progress in science and BTEC Health and Social Development was better in comparison to other subjects.

The academy's tracking of student progress and early entrant results indicate standards of attainment are expected to rise for this year's Year 11 students. The academy predict that around 38% will achieve at least a grade C in English and around 45% will achieve at least a grade C in mathematics. The academy also anticipates that the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C at GCSE including English and mathematics will reach the floor target of 35%. These predictions are based on a more robust and realistic assessment of students' progress.

The academy's tracking of student progress in the Years 7 to 10 shows a very mixed picture. In Year 10, for example, the proportion of students on track to achieve their aspirational targets is very low. In contrast, student progress in Year 8, according to academy assessment data, has significantly improved this year. The academy put this increase down to the 'competency curriculum': a focus on learning skills, which this year group experienced in Year 7 and continue to experience in Year 8.

In lessons seen, students' progress was generally satisfactory. In some lessons, progress was good when students were actively engaged in learning and tasks were well matched to their abilities. Students' work in their books also showed that many are making satisfactory progress. In a few books, for example in mathematics, students' work was poorly presented and showed insufficient progress.

Student outcomes in the sixth form are inadequate, largely because too many students were recruited to courses to which they were not suited. Students have not acquired the literacy and numeracy skills needed to progress well. Students currently

in Year 12 are making better progress because they are undertaking more suitable vocational courses. The academy is able to offer an increasing range of options because of a strong link that is developing with the nearby further education provider.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Very good progress has been made in improving attendance for all year groups and for all different groups. From a very low level, attendance has risen quite sharply and is now close to the national average. Rigorous systems have been introduced for monitoring attendance. The work of the academy's attendance improvement officer has been particularly effective in improving the attendance of students who have been persistently absent in the past.

Students' behaviour has improved. In many of the lessons observed, behaviour was good. At break and dinner times, and between lessons, students were well behaved and courteous. In some lessons, students became passive either because they found work too difficult or because the teacher was talking too much. Some were passive because their skills to learn independently are underdeveloped. The academy is assiduous in its recording of all incidents of behaviour that detract from learning. Records show that far fewer students are being excluded. Students spoke of a minority of lessons in which the behaviour of a few students disrupts learning. This is largely in the lessons where teaching is weak. The academy is beginning to deploy staff more effectively to work with students in order to prevent incidents of poor behaviour from occurring in the first place.

The academy has adapted the curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9 in order to improve the skills students need to be successful at GCSE and beyond. This is done through lessons known as 'the competency curriculum'. There are early signs, from assessment data, that this approach is having a positive impact on students' progress in a range of subjects. Evidence from lesson observations during the visit did not conclusively confirm this. The link with the university, in particular the medical school, is being used to broaden the horizons of students. For instance, students undertaking health-related courses are regular visitors to the university hospital. The focus on improving basic skills is complemented by strategies aimed at promoting research and creativity. For instance, students are currently involved in developing a maze containing thought-provoking exhibits.

The academy is rightly developing the curriculum for Years 10 and 11 in response to student needs. The courses in health and social development are a particular strength, and the science curriculum is improving, for instance, through the recent introduction of separate sciences. The academy recognises that there is still some way to go in using all subjects to effectively promote literacy and numeracy and research skills in general.

The academy reports that teaching in the sixth form has similar characteristics as that seen in the main school. The academy has improved the mentor support available to sixth formers and the guidance they receive for making choices for future education, training or employment. More students are remaining in education post-16.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching observed varied. Just less than 40% of teaching was judged to be good or better, with approximately 50% being judged to be satisfactory. A small proportion of teaching was inadequate.

Teachers' planning was written in great detail. The planning format used helped teachers to identify learning objectives for the lesson but did not always help them to clearly outline what they expected students of different abilities to achieve. Even where planning highlighted different levels of work, all students still worked on the same activity with some then moving on to more demanding work. In lessons, this often meant that more able students were not challenged and work for the least able was not appropriate. All planning identified personal, learning and thinking skills objectives. In the best lessons, these became an integral part of the lesson. Weaker teaching failed to integrate these objectives in the lesson: instead these were clumsily introduced and became a distraction because too many skills were referred to.

When teaching was good or better, teachers were very clear as to what they expected students to learn in lessons. Tasks and activities were well matched to the different abilities of students and, as a result, students were engaged in learning and appropriately challenged. In an English lesson, for example, outstanding teaching led to students enthusiastically summarising the book *Of Mice and Men* and very effectively using examination criteria to recognise their own achievements. In a science lesson, the teacher ensured there was a good pace at the start of the lesson through very effective questioning and short well-focused activities. In this lesson, the teacher quickly realised when some students were struggling and intervened by giving a clear explanation which helped students to move quickly on in their learning. Good teaching was observed in physical education lessons. Teachers' role modelled what it was they expected students to do and then kept checking on how they developed their skills throughout the lesson using learning criteria given to students. This coaching style gave students the confidence to push themselves and the clear learning criteria gave them a framework to use to evaluate each other's efforts.

When teaching was inadequate or barely satisfactory, teachers failed to clearly explain the purpose of the lesson and there was little done to adapt teaching or the

tasks given to students to match their different abilities. Many opportunities were lost to intervene throughout the lesson in direct response to how well students were learning. In a couple of lessons, for example, the teacher failed to review how well the students had completed the starter activity, missing a valuable opportunity to drive home a teaching point and then build on what students had begun to learn. Less effective teaching also missed opportunities to improve students' literacy skills, which often hampered the progress they made.

The quality of teachers' marking varies across and within subjects. There were examples of marking that graded students' attainment using National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades. Some marking, but not enough, explained to the students how they could improve their work. Target grades were supposed to be displayed on the front of all student books, but this was not found to be the case.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The senior leaders are focused on the acute need to raise students' attainment. The most significant impact of their work is seen in the improvements to students' behaviour and attendance, which has created a purposeful environment where students are more likely to achieve when the quality of teaching is good or better. There still remains a huge deficit of learning to overcome but again the impact of the actions of senior leaders has already indicated that there is some progress. This is more so in mathematics than English.

Monitoring of teaching and learning by academy staff has become more rigorous in expectation and judgement. This increased rigour accounts for a reduction, when comparing 2009 and 2011 records, in the proportion of lessons observed that were good or better. The judgements made on the quality of teaching have been moderated by external partners and this has led to a greater consistency in judgement. Observations have been right to identify that teaching is not effectively promoting literacy skills, matching expectation to student ability and not giving students opportunities to develop independent learning skills.

There are clear roles and responsibilities for senior leaders. All senior leaders are taking a masters or PhD qualification, promoting the benefits of the sponsorship of Nottingham University and enabling senior leaders to explore a research-based evaluation of the academy's work. The Principal has created a more fluid management structure amongst senior leaders which aims to ensure that responsibility is shared. This has led to senior leaders acknowledging interdependence and teamwork.

There are systems to ensure that all senior and middle leaders are held to account. Quality assurance activity takes place and the rigour of this is improving. Documentation outlining the senior leadership group reviews, reviews are an

evaluation of a subject department by senior leaders, is brief. For example, one refers to most students making progress but has no reference to exact proportions or a breakdown in terms of groups. There is a general lack of precision in all of the reviews and, as a result, they do not unpick the strengths and weaknesses of provision and ensure that areas for development are measurable. The senior leadership group reviews are expected to inform improvement plans but, in their present form, they do not provide a robust evaluation.

The governing body brings together an eclectic group of people which is a benefit to the work of the academy. The links with the university are used well. The governing body receives regular helpful information from the Principal which is allowing them to ask critical questions. There is, rightly, an emphasis on monitoring the standards of attainment and the governing body recognises that the 2011 results will be a clear marker as to the success of the academy's work.

Safeguarding regulations are met.

External support

The links with the university are proving very successful. There are many examples of how these links work:

- an Assistant Principal is working with a tutor from Nottingham University's School of Education to develop the quality of teaching and learning
- senior staff have worked with staff from the university on improvement planning
- a 'Literacy Thank Tank' has been set up staffed by members of the governing body, academy staff, invited academics from the university and local authority representatives to research and communicate best practice in developing literacy
- University of Nottingham undergraduates are working with students as literacy coaches, assessment coaches and classroom assistants.

These innovative ways of working are beginning to have an impact on teaching and learning.

Other external support has included an English and mathematics teacher from the Specialist Schools Academies Trust teaching groups of students, which has added positively to the focus on core standards. There has also been good support from the School Improvement Partner and academy lead officer who have, for example, observed teaching.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise attainment, especially in English and mathematics.
- Improve the quality of teaching by better matching teaching to the different abilities of students and continually adapting teaching and/or activities in lessons to ensure students' learning is accelerated.
- Ensure teachers raise their expectations of what students should achieve in lessons, making most of the students' often good behaviour.

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

Andrew Cook
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc David Shelton, Chair of the Governing Body
The Academies Group, DfE [colin.diamond@education.gsi.gov.uk]

Once the school has had 24 hours to report any factual inaccuracies, the post-inspection letter is copied as appropriate to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- DfE - Academies Group colin.diamond@education.gsi.gov.uk

The letters should also be copied electronically to:

paul.brooker@ofsted.gov.uk - the HMI with national responsibility for academies
each member of the inspection team,
the PO for SCC
ACADInspectionReports@ypla.gov.uk

A copy with editing marked up should be forwarded to the:

- lead HMI
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