

Serco Inspections
Cedar House
21 William Street
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 1LH

Ofsted
T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Serco
Direct T 0121 683 3888

30 June 2011

Mr Robert Evans
Principal
The Ridings' Federation Winterbourne International Academy
High Street
Winterbourne
South Gloucestershire
BS36 1JL

Dear Mr Evans

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of The Ridings' Federation Winterbourne International Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with John Seal HMI to your academy on 28 and 29 June 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 Chief Executive Principal and Deputy Chief Executive Principal of The Ridings' Federation of Academies, the Principal and other senior staff, middle leaders and groups of students from Winterbourne International Academy. An inspector met with the Chair of the Local Governing Body for the academy who is also a director of The Ridings' Federation Trust. In addition, a telephone discussion was held with a consultant who has been supporting the leadership of the academy and who was formerly the designated Improvement Partner. The inspection team did not focus on the work of the sixth form and there were no Year 11 students at the academy on the dates of the visit.

Context

In 2007, the predecessor school, The Ridings High, was invited by the Department of Children, Schools and Families to become the lead educational sponsor in a hard

federation pathfinder programme supporting a local comprehensive school with lower achievement, King Edmund Community School. A distinctive feature of this federation was to promote a strong international dimension in its work and the implementation of the International Baccalaureate. In September 2009, The Ridings' Federation of Academies was established with the predecessor school becoming Winterbourne International Academy and King Edmund Community School opening as Yate International Academy. There is no financial sponsorship for the federation but it has strong educational links with Airbus UK, CISCO Systems and the University of Bath. Governance is at two levels, with a board of directors for The Ridings' Federation Trust and a local governing body for each academy. However, although there are substantial delegated powers and functions for each local governing body, the formal responsibility for the academies within the federation remains with the Trust.

When the academies were established, the headteacher of the predecessor school became the Chief Executive Principal of the two academies, responsible for their strategic direction with a Principal and leadership team in each academy responsible for the leadership and management. There have been specific roles established across the federation to support improvement, including a Deputy Executive Principal, directors for English, mathematics, international work and vocational development, and advanced skills teachers in a range of subjects. From September 2011, the sixth form will be fully integrated across both academies in the federation.

Winterbourne is a very large and oversubscribed academy for students aged 11 to 18. The academy follows the International Baccalaureate middle years programme and the curriculum is grouped into eight learning areas. Most students are from a White British heritage and the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than average. The percentage with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, as is the proportion with a statement of special educational needs. Students' special educational needs include communication, moderate learning and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Since becoming an academy, the specialist subjects have been modern foreign languages and mathematics; the predecessor school's specialism was technology. The academy has a very stable student roll. Most of the staff from the predecessor school transferred to the academy when it opened and there are no issues with recruitment or retention. The academy has the International School and Investors in People awards and Healthy Schools status. There are plans for a substantial building project on the academy site to commence in January 2012.

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

The impact of the academy's strategies and provision present a strong and improving picture. In 2010, the proportion of students achieving five higher GCSE grades including English and mathematics had improved compared with the last results of the predecessor school and was significantly higher than the national

average. The result was in line with the academy's target for this indicator. A further strong improvement was seen in the percentage of students gaining five or more GCSEs at the higher grades compared to the 2009 results, reversing a decline in this indicator for the predecessor school. Results for English show a similar profile of improvement and are well above the national figure. Overall, the target for the proportion of students gaining at least three A* or A grades at GCSE was met, with over one third achieving this performance indicator. The academy's specialist subjects also show clear improvements on the outcomes for the predecessor school. In mathematics, the percentage of students gaining a higher level grade was significantly above the national average, with over one third achieving grades A* or A. There is a similarly strong profile for modern foreign languages, with almost half of the cohort gaining a higher level GCSE grade. Again, this is an improvement on the 2009 result from the predecessor school and significantly above the national figure. Academy data for the current year indicate further increases across a range of measures, suggesting a continuing trajectory of improvement in attainment.

The academy has developed an effective progress tracking system and the quality of information and analysis of information and data is very good. The strong focus on the international dimension within the work of the academy is clear. An example of this is the development of the English Baccalaureate range of core, science, humanities and arts subjects for students. Results for 2010 show that nearly three in ten students achieved this range of subjects at the higher grades, almost double the national average.

Taking their starting points into consideration, most students make good progress overall. This is in line with academy predictions. Senior leaders are well aware of the challenge in improving the progress made by students across the ability range in Years 7 to 11. Generally, this has been more effective for gifted and talented students than for some other groups such as those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Winterbourne has used its federated status well to develop courses in tandem with Yate international Academy which provide for students who want to pursue vocational options. Students in Year 10 are currently undertaking this broader range of courses and have yet to be assessed and benchmarked nationally. However, discussions with them revealed that they appreciate the opportunity to study these vocationally based options. Senior pastoral staff also note that better matched courses have improved the behaviour of some students, particularly less-able boys. Academy predictions for the current year show an improvement in the progress made by boys and girls in mathematics by Year 11 and by the latter group in English, compared with 2010. Boys' progress in English is predicted to show a slight decline. Although this group represents a much smaller number, the progress measures for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities show a more mixed picture. This is also the case for the group of students known to be eligible for free school meals. This more uneven profile reflects the relative lack of integrated and coherent systems to support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Attendance is consistently high and has improved over the last two years for Years 7 to 11. Punctuality is emphasised consistently and students recognise the importance of attending school regularly. Academy policies and procedures are robust and systematic, with effective links to other agencies. Information for parents and carers is unequivocal about the importance of regular attendance.

Inspectors observed both good and exemplary behaviour in lessons and around the academy. Students are polite, articulate and prepared to share their views. The academy has developed programmes which involve single-sex teaching in some science options. In a science lesson observed, the Year 9 girls spoken to felt that the fact that they were taught in a single-sex class enhanced their learning. However, behaviour was only satisfactory where lessons lacked pace or where students' needs were not being met effectively. This was the case, for example, where they were not actively involved in their learning or were required to listen to over-long introductions by the teacher. Data show a decrease in the incidents resulting in fixed-term exclusions for 2009–10 compared to the last year of the predecessor school. The academy introduced a revised behaviour policy and monitoring system in September 2010, with improved analysis of incidents relating to behaviour by groups and individuals. The current year shows a continuing steady decrease in exclusions. However, observations during the inspection indicated that some vulnerable students were not fully engaged in lessons.

Students told inspectors that they feel safe, that bullying is rare and, when this occurs, it is dealt with promptly. They feel that they are well supported to live healthily and understand the academy's focus on the international dimension to learning. Students appreciate the range of opportunities available to them at the academy and the quality of relationships with adults and students. They feel that the academy helps them to be well prepared for the next stage of their education or the world of work.

The effectiveness of provision

The academy has a robust system for the regular monitoring of the quality of teaching. Academy data show that the good quality of teaching which was a feature of the predecessor school has been maintained and improved. The monitoring of the quality of teaching is undertaken by senior and middle leaders and has been developed with the support of external consultants. The academy is aware that this cycle does not currently systematically review the quality of teaching for all subjects that a member of staff may teach within a faculty. However, the evaluations of teaching by the senior leaders are accurate and detailed.

During the inspection, good and better teaching and learning were observed in a range of subjects but particularly English, mathematics, French, Spanish and music. The best lessons moved forward at a good pace, with the teacher displaying strong subject knowledge and high expectations of behaviour and the work to be completed. Effective questioning helped to support teachers' understanding of how well students were progressing in their work and to adjust the teaching as necessary. Students were encouraged to assess their own learning and, in lessons, had explicit guidance on what they needed to do to improve their work, often associated with a clear explanation of how this is linked to a grade for GCSE or National Curriculum level. There were examples of high quality practical activities which enabled students to apply their understanding, skills and knowledge. Discussions with students showed that they particularly enjoyed this type of work. In less effective lessons, activities did not fully match the needs of students and particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Sometimes, teachers spent too much time introducing topics or lessons and this slowed the progress made by students as they did not have sufficient opportunity to practise their understanding and skills. Marking across the school is variable. Some books scrutinised showed effective marking, with clear guidance for students on the next steps they need to take in order to improve their work, but this was not the norm. Some books are not marked sufficiently regularly and this causes the standard of presentation to deteriorate.

The curriculum has developed well since the academy was established, with a clear focus on the international dimension and broadening provision to meet a wider range of abilities and interests. The implementation of International Baccalaureate middle years programme has been effective. In developing the learning pathways which include vocational subjects, the academy has been successful in working with its partner within the federation to develop a widening range of examination options. The specialisms of mathematics and modern foreign languages have enhanced learning, for example by encouraging students to study a range of languages, including Italian and Japanese, sometimes through extra-curricular activities.

The academy gives a high priority to providing personalised care for students and particularly those who are identified as vulnerable in some way. Students with a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities are well known to staff and generally supported successfully. For example, the B4LC unit is an effective base for vulnerable students. Young people spoken to were grateful for the support found there, including the 'drop in' facility to undertake homework and use the computers at lunchtime. The appointment of a learning mentor during this academic year has led to an improvement in personal development for some vulnerable students. However, although these students and their families are generally well supported, the monitoring and tracking of their learning and progress is inconsistent and not effectively analysed to promote further improvement in outcomes and provision.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The leadership of the predecessor school has provided the senior managers for the federation overall and at Winterbourne. This has provided continuity during a period of considerable change as the academy was established. The Principal has a thorough knowledge of the predecessor school and has used this to develop the provision at the academy with a strong focus on raising achievement for all students. He is supported by a well structured and experienced senior team. Middle leaders are committed to improving achievement and provision for all students and are developing their roles within the learning area structure. Their work with senior leaders in the cycle of learning area reviews generally provides appropriate challenge and support, with a focus on the quality of teaching and learning, outcomes and provision. However, the recommendations for the learning area review for special educational needs and/or disabilities have not been implemented fully. Systems for the safeguarding of students are robust and meet all the current government requirements.

There are clear lines of accountability throughout the academy. Self-evaluation is detailed, analytical and accurate, leading to a comprehensive development plan which is effective for most aspects of the academy's work. The local governing body is well led and its members have a range of skills to support and challenge senior staff at the academy. The governing body understands its strengths and weaknesses and is developing its contacts with individual learning areas. There is a clear structure for the communication between the local governing body and the federation Trust. Taking into account its systems to promote the enhancement of achievement and provision, together with the strong structure for leadership and management which have already led to improved outcomes, the academy is well placed to make further improvement.

External support

The academy benefits well from a range of external support. It has engaged two consultants to support its development and to provide external evaluation and challenge, one of whom was, until March this year, the School Improvement Partner. The consultants' work has focused on support for learning area reviews and specific work with middle leaders on the monitoring of teaching, learning and the identification of underachievement within faculties. The Principal and senior leaders appreciate the advice offered as well as the robust challenge. The academy has also worked with local authority staff on extended school provision.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Implement fully the recommendations from the learning area review for special educational needs and learning support, and measure the impact on the outcomes for all groups of vulnerable students.
- Improve the quality and consistency of marking across the academy so that students are involved in the process and clearly understand how well they are learning and what they need to do to improve.

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

Robert Pyner
Her Majesty's Inspector

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