

16 July 2011

Mr D L Sutton
Principal
Maltby Academy
Braithwell Road
Maltby
South Yorkshire
S66 8AB

Dear Mr Sutton,

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Maltby Academy

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy on 14 July 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 and met with the Principal, members of the senior leadership team, other staff, groups of students, the Chair and another member of the Governing Body and the consultant headteacher.

Context

The academy opened January 2010 in the buildings of its predecessor school. Detailed planning for a partial rebuilding programme has recently begun. The lead sponsor is U-Explore, a digital media and advice business, and the co-sponsor is Rotherham local authority. The academy has subject specialisms in business, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). It is part of the Maltby Learning Community and has formed a partnership with Sheffield Hallam University.

The academy is larger than average with 1158 students on roll, including 112 in the sixth form. The proportion of students known to be eligible to free school meals is slightly above average. Nearly all students are of White British heritage and very few do not speak English as their home language. The proportion of the students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly above average but the proportion with a statement to meet their special educational need is lower than average. Very few students join or leave the academy other than at the start of the year.

The Principal was previously the headteacher of the predecessor school for two years. During the transition, there have been some changes in staffing and an overall increase in the number of teachers. The academy reports much less difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff recently. Strict uniform and behaviour policies have been introduced and other traditions, such as the house system, have been built upon by the academy.

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

Students join the academy with attainment that is overall slightly below average. Attainment by the end of Year 11 has been, to date, broadly average and is improving. Attainment on entry to the sixth form generally is below average and outcomes are in line with expectations and good in some respects. Very nearly all students attain at least five GCSE pass grades by the end of compulsory schooling. This is better than average and reflects the range of qualifications offered to students. However, in the academy's first year, just over half of Year 11 attained five GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A* to C, which is in line with the average. Attainment in English, mathematics and science remained below average. Boys' attainment was below average, too. Weaknesses in literacy, particularly writing, act as a barrier to learning for many students. Narrowing these gaps in attainment by accelerating progress is the academy's top priority. While it is too early to see a strong effect on students' outcomes, there are encouraging signs.

The quality of learning is improving and there is mounting evidence that students' progress is accelerating as a result. The students who completed Year 11 in 2010 had made satisfactory progress, sustaining an improving trend, but there were variations between subjects. Girls made better progress than boys and there were slight differences between groups of pupils. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities made slightly better than average progress. However, students who started with middle-to-lower attainment, or relatively higher attainment, made slightly less than average progress. Inspection evidence confirms the academy's view that students now make good progress in most lessons, including in the sixth form. Students' attitudes to learning are mainly good, reflecting higher expectations and a positive climate for learning. There are some early if patchy signs of more independent learning, for example when students ask their own curious questions, collaborate well, or thoughtfully select the level they will aim for in their work. There are also promising indications of strengthening skills on entry, linked to the work done within the Maltby Learning Community. However, in a minority of lessons, students' learning is no better than satisfactory, because factors such as weak literacy and over-reliance on adult direction continue to act as a barrier to their progress.

The academy leaders set challenging targets for the current year. Based on systematic assessments academy leaders predict improved attainment and progress for virtually all groups in Key Stages 3 and 4. Already-secured results and moderated assessments of English and mathematics at GCSE indicate attainment will this year be close to average, from a cohort with starting points no higher than previously. The academy expects that a quarter of students will attain three or more A or A* grades, which would be three times as

many as the year before. This suggests the academy had moved closer to its challenging targets and its goal of consistently good progress.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students' attitudes are improving well. The academy leaders have worked hard to establish a community where students feel safe and secure. Good relationships between adults and students are evident in classrooms and in the vertical tutor groups. All the evidence from a range of stakeholders indicates that behaviour has improved. This is because the great majority of students have responded well to the higher expectations communicated by staff. Older students have a clear understanding of the direction their academy is taking and describe a dramatic transformation in its ethos. Although some students do not like the strict rules about their appearance, for example, they understand the reasons for them. Adults act as positive role models and manage inappropriate behaviour confidently so that disruption is kept to a minimum. Good relationships are becoming the norm in lessons and at the more informal times of day. While the use of short term exclusions and isolation within school remain at a significant level, they have reduced recently and there are targets to reduce them further.

The house system is being used to create healthy competition and a sense of being valued. Attendance has risen although it is still below average. The proportion of students who are persistent absentees has significantly reduced. The proportion of students who did not go on to education training or employment after school has fallen to 3.8%, which compares favourably with the national figure. Retention and progression for the sixth form is usually good, and students spoken to during the inspection feel well-guided, supported and motivated to aim for high challenges. Students enjoy the growing range of opportunities they have, to develop their interests and confidence. They are proud to lead presentations to house assemblies, win awards and take part in performances.

The effectiveness of provision

The academy leaders recognise that, although the proportion of good lessons is increasing, the quality of teaching remains satisfactory overall. Lessons follow a consistent structure, with a sequence of activities and reviews of learning. Learning objectives are well matched to the range of students in the class and teachers make regular reference to levels and assessment criteria. In the best lessons, teachers' good knowledge and enthusiasm about their subject leads to strong relationships and enjoyment of learning. Helpfully clear objectives give these lessons strong direction and pace. Questioning is challenging and involves most students. In the weaker lessons observed, teachers had focused more on the elements of the standard lesson structure rather than on ensuring good impact on learning. This led, for example, to ineffective starter activities. Opportunities were missed to check the understanding of all the students in the class before moving on. Satisfactory lessons were sometimes desk-bound and too dominated by teacher talk when they did not need to be, missing opportunities for students to be more independent in their learning.

Clear systems for assessing students' progress towards challenging individual targets and to raise their awareness of assessment criteria in different subjects have been established. The best marking, exemplified in the humanities, gives detailed feedback with targets for improvement in the subject. However, other marking is less specific about how to reach subject targets. At times there is under-marking of routine pieces of work and little correction or intervention to reduce weaknesses in spelling, grammar or punctuation.

The academy's ambitious plans for the curriculum have a clear rationale to equip students with the qualifications, skills and attitudes needed in the workplace and community. The curriculum is evolving. A largely traditional curriculum for Years 7 and 8 is followed by three years of preparation for GCSE or BTEC. Basic skills and work-related learning are increasingly emphasised. The sponsor has made a major contribution to improving students' access to information, advice and guidance. The development of the academy's specialisms is at an early stage, but targets to improve attainment in ICT have been met. The range of pathways ensures that appropriate provision and accreditation are available to all students. The academy has adapted provision for higher attaining students, taking account of national proposals for an English Baccalaureate. Students placed in smaller groups because of their slower progress generally appreciate the extra help they receive. The safeguarding and well-being of students is given high priority, reflected in clear procedures and the careful updating of staff training.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The academy's leaders and managers have won wide confidence through their work to embed higher expectations. Staff and students clearly recognise the ambitious direction set for the academy, because leaders have effectively shared higher expectations. Students are mainly very positive about recent changes and the Principal's impact on behaviour and ethos. The great majority of students are proud of their academy and doing their best to help it succeed.

Leaders and managers show an unrelenting focus on raising attainment. Clear systems are in use to track and analyse how well groups and individual students are doing and intervene decisively when needed. The crucial importance of ensuring consistently good teaching is central to the Academy Development Plan. This is coherent and makes sharp use of milestones and criteria in most areas. The governing body, who brings a good range of expertise to support the academy's development, is kept informed about performance. A central thrust driving improvement has been clarification of what counts as effective teaching and learning. Senior leaders have a good understanding of the current strengths and weaknesses of teaching based on systematic monitoring and evaluation which draws on a wide range of evidence. As well as giving teachers responsibility for raising attainment, they have significantly invested in an innovative programme of professional development. This has fostered thoughtful dialogue about outstanding teaching among many staff. Some twenty teachers are enrolled on Masters courses through the partnership with Sheffield Hallam University and the Outstanding Teachers Group meets regularly to share good practice. Training and coaching have helped to spread expertise, with a positive impact on

trends in teaching quality. Leaders have clear plans to increase personalised support in order to improve the minority of teaching which is no better than satisfactory.

The academy leaders have a realistic understanding of the progress the academy has made towards achieving its targets and know what they need to do next to realise their bold aspirations for the community. A solid foundation has been laid for the future.

External support

Good use has been made of the School Improvement Partner and a consultant headteacher, who provide rigorous evaluation and contribute usefully to strategic review. The academy leaders work closely with the local authority, its co-sponsor, and both contribute to and use its support. The work of the Maltby Learning Community of schools is well focused on tackling the obstacles to good learning and progress across the age range, through standardising assessment and discussing how to improve in key areas such as boys' writing.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise attainment to the national average, by increasing the proportion of students who make the expected progress or better, particularly in mathematics, English and science.

- Improve attendance to at least the national average and reduce the use of exclusion.

- Ensure that the great majority of teaching and learning is good or better, by increasing teachers' understanding of how they can, within their different subjects,
 - improve students' speaking and listening, reading and writing
 - provide good opportunities for independent learning
 - check understanding before moving students on.

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

Yours sincerely

Ms Susan Bowles

Her Majesty's Inspector

cc

chair of governors
the Academies Group, DCSF [Paul.hann@dcf.gov.uk]