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Mr Roger Gilbert
Principal
The Ridings' Federation Yate International Academy
Sunridge Park
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Dear Mr Gilbert

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

Introduction

Following my visit with Sue Frater HMI to your academy on 6–7 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 inspection was a first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, visited 24 lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, Chief Executive Principal, governors, staff and students.

Context

The Ridings' Federation Yate International Academy opened in September 2009 in the same buildings as its predecessor school; the academy will transfer to new buildings in July 2012. The Principal was the headteacher of the predecessor school; most staff also transferred. In September 2011, The Ridings' Federation Yate International Academy will incorporate a local primary school, establishing an all-through academy.

There are currently 610 students on roll; most are from White British backgrounds. An average proportion of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The academy's specialisms are in sports, science and health. The academy has a number of awards, including the International School Award and Healthy Schools Plus status.

The academy works within a hard federation with another local 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. Leadership of the federation is provided by a Chief Executive Principal. There are two elements to the academy's governance: The Ridings' Federation of Academies Trust and the local governing body. A number of specific roles have been established across the federation; these include several advanced skills teachers. The federation operates a collaborative sixth form in Year 12 across its two academies and many students follow some of their courses at the federation's other academy. Students currently in Year 13 attend some of their courses in two other local schools; these arrangements are now drawing to a close and, from September 2011, the federation sixth form will extend into Year 13.

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

Students' attainment is rising. The 2010 GCSE results were broadly average by most measures; the students who took these examinations made the progress expected given their starting points in Year 7. Patterns of achievement across different subjects and groups of students were very consistent. The 2010 A-level results were below average, but these Year 13 students made the progress expected given their examination results at the end of Year 11.

The way in which staff track students' academic progress has improved significantly in the last two years. Assessments are carried out frequently and the results are analysed carefully. The tracking data indicate that students currently in Year 11 are on track to achieve more than those who took GCSE examinations last year. Many of these students have already achieved qualifications through early examination entry.

Students now make at least satisfactory progress in the very large majority of lessons; they make good or better progress in just under two thirds of lessons. Students generally work well independently and in groups, although some lack confidence when speaking.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students behave well around the academy and in most lessons. Improvements in behaviour can be seen, for example, in a significant reduction in fixed-term exclusions. In the very small minority of lessons that do not interest them, students sometimes engage in low-level disruptive behaviour.

Attendance has improved and is now high. The proportion of students who are persistently absent has fallen.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is improving well. The system introduced to help teachers manage classroom behaviour has helped to reduce misbehaviour; most teachers use the system well. As a result, classrooms are purposeful and orderly. The majority of teaching is now good, although it is inadequate in a very small minority of lessons. Students know their target grades and understand how to improve their work so that they achieve their targets. In their lessons, teachers routinely refer to levels or grades and what students need to do to achieve them – this is helping to raise achievement.

Leaders have put a lot of work into improving teachers' lesson planning. They have also done much to establish common expectations for every lesson, such as sharing the objectives of the lesson with students. This work has been very useful: lesson plans are now typically good and all teachers try to use these techniques in their lessons. However, not all teachers currently have the full range of teaching skills necessary to deliver these better plans or to use the teaching techniques to their full effect.

The main weakness in less-effective lessons is that the work does not challenge all students fully. In some cases, this is because the lesson plans do not take sufficient account of the needs of different students or the activities are not sufficiently challenging for everyone. While the academy now has very good data about students' targets and current achievement, many teachers make too little use of it when they plan their lessons. In some cases, teachers do not give the students a clear idea of how long they will have to complete a task, or they give them too long to do it; this slows the pace of the lessons and reduces the challenge for some students.

Students are well cared for and supported. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are very effective. Records are maintained in line with the federation's comprehensive policy and a range of helpful training has been provided for staff and governors. Good provision is made for the relatively large number of students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The impact of this provision is evaluated carefully and these students' achievement is tracked well. Key to the academy's success with these students is the effective mentoring system and the close partnerships with parents and carers and external partners. Students respond positively to the guild (house) system, with its rewards and competition; its introduction has had a positive impact on behaviour and attendance.

Good progress has been made in reviewing the curriculum to ensure that it matches the needs, interests and aspiration of everyone. The curriculum has a number of positive features, including a useful mixture of academic and vocational pathways for older students, early entry to GCSE and a skills-based curriculum in Year 7. There are good participation rates in the wide range of extra-curricular activities, especially sport. Collaborative sixth form arrangements provide students with access to a wide range of courses.

A particular feature of the curriculum is the strong international dimension, which permeates all subjects and aspects of the academy's work. This work is well planned and activities are carefully mapped across the curriculum. The academy provides an extensive range of international events and has links with a very wide range of countries. Staff and students talk about events such as 'international departure day' with great enthusiasm.

The specialist areas of science, physical education and health have a positive impact on the quality of provision, for example by modelling good practice in planning and assessment. They are helping to raise expectations of staff and students, for example through science links with Bristol University and the sports leadership ambassador programme.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The Principal is providing clear and effective leadership and a strong drive for improvement. He is well supported by other senior and middle leaders. Their evaluation of the academy's progress and remaining weaknesses is thorough, realistic and very honest. The academy is developing well and has a strong capacity to continue its improvement.

Good work is being done to develop the quality of teaching. The way in which leaders monitor lessons is carefully considered and has evolved to reflect the academy's shifting needs. Almost all of the lessons visited by inspectors were observed jointly with senior or middle leaders; all were able to analyse and judge the quality of the lessons thoroughly and accurately. There is a good mixture of general work to support teaching, such as whole-academy training events, and individual support for teachers based on an understanding of their specific needs. Where teaching is inadequate, intensive support is provided.

Leaders have focused in particular on improving provision and achievement in the core subjects of English and mathematics. This work takes a number of forms and has had a positive impact. For example, useful meetings are held between heads of guild, senior leaders and the heads of these subjects to look in considerable detail at the achievement of individual students.

The way in which leaders use data about student achievement and other outcomes in their work is a notable strength. Assessments are carried out frequently and the data are analysed carefully and thoroughly. The reliability of this data means that leaders have a clear and accurate picture of students' current achievement. Their predictions about last year's GCSE results were extremely accurate. The data are used to check the achievement of different groups of students; this information is used to provide individuals with additional help and support where necessary.

The introduction of the federation sixth form was planned for September 2012, but for a number of reasons had to be brought forward. This understandably resulted in a few minor teething problems, although these were resolved quickly. The way in which leaders monitor the work of the sixth form is improving and there are good plans to support further development. However, the way in which leaders use data about students' achievement is not as good as in the rest of the academy and leaders do not have such a clear picture of students' progress against their targets.

The Chief Executive Principal of the federation and the academy's Principal work closely together, and the federation is playing a valuable role in the academy's improvement. The Ridings' Federation of Academies Trust and local governing body work in close partnership. The federation provides professional support and overall accountability; the local governing body monitors the academy's work, but also provides a useful link with the local community.

External support

Leaders are making effective use of help and support from a number of sources. Much support comes through the federation, with a number of subject departments working closely together. Other consultants have also provided useful support.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the consistency of teaching by:
 - eliminating any remaining inadequate teaching
 - ensuring that, in all lessons, the work fully challenges students of different abilities.

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

Christopher Russell
Her Majesty's Inspector

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