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Mr Andy Yarrow
Principal
Chelsea Academy
Lots Road
Chelsea
London
SW10 0AB

Dear Mr Yarrow

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Chelsea Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with John Daniell HMI to your academy on 13–14 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 inspection was a first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, visited 20 lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, governors, staff, students, parents and carers.

Context

Chelsea Academy opened in September 2009 in temporary accommodation. It moved in September 2010 to the current high quality premises long-listed for the 2011 RIBA Stirling prize. In 2009, the academy admitted its first cohort of 162 Year 7 students. The academy plans to grow each year with a new intake. It will open to sixth form students in September 2011. The academy's specialism is in science.

There are currently 324 students on roll. The proportion of students from minority ethnic heritage is high. The number of home languages other than English spoken in the academy is extensive. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free

school meals is high. The academy is sponsored by the London Diocesan Board for Schools and the local authority the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

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

Students' enjoyment of school is evident from their enthusiasm and commitment. Attainment is high. The higher performing students in Year 8 have already undertaken a GCSE examination in mathematics and demonstrated a very impressive understanding of mathematical concepts. The National Curriculum levels reached by students in most subjects are well above those expected for their ages. Students are active participants in learning and often contribute to the construction of lessons, working well in both independent and collaborative contexts. Teachers have a very clear understanding of each individual student. They have very productive working relationships that ensure progress is generally very strong for all groups in the academy.

The progress and tracking systems are already very well established. Clear information for class teachers and for leaders at all levels is widely used to very good effect. Students have a clear idea of their challenging targets and what they need to do to achieve them. The academy has demonstrated how it has identified and tackled prior underperformance and has been successful in narrowing the attainment gap between groups through focussed interventions. The student tracking systems include a range of indicators that help to establish a holistic view of a student's academic strengths and personal development.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students' behaviour in lessons and around the academy is exemplary. They appreciate the range of resources and high quality of the facilities they have and they look after them well. They conduct themselves with great maturity and contribute to the progress made in lessons. The wide range of ethnic heritage is embraced in the academy and students thrive on the diversity and develop a wider understanding of their peers and the wider world. They contribute a great deal to the academy and feel they are not only listened to but they are partners in developing the academy further. They carry this responsibility with great pride and consideration.

As a consequence of the partnership with teachers, students feel safe and are willing to participate in learning activities that challenge them in a variety of ways. A group of girls, during a physical education lesson, worked very well together to ensure they developed their climbing skills and overcame their anxieties to climb to a high standard, in a short period of time, on the climbing wall. Around three quarters of the students take part in the wide range of activities after school and all students take part in a weekly curriculum enrichment programme. Attendance has improved significantly since last year and is now well above average.

The effectiveness of provision

The development of the teaching team and the associate staff is a high priority as the academy grows and the staffing increases considerably. The teaching already has significant strengths. Staff know students well and establish strong relationships with students, parents and carers. The progress tracking system is comprehensive and assists with this. The coaching groups and six houses are well-organised and help to develop the academy's positive ethos and high aspirations for all students. During one coaching group session, a student provoked thinking within the group with a well-chosen quotation he had researched about seizing opportunities no matter what the obstacles. Assessment to support learning is well established. Teachers use a range of strategies for continuously assessing students' performance throughout lessons to ensure that the tasks are successful in promoting high levels of progress. The use of questioning is also highly developed to probe students' understanding further and challenge their thinking. The marking of students' work is thorough and informative. There is a consistency in the approach across the academy and the vast majority of the teaching is at least good. The best lessons are truly inspirational and compelling, giving students opportunities to excel in an environment in which they can take risks in their learning. Where teachers work one-to-one with students or in small groups, learning is very strong and accelerates. When there is too much whole-class work and the teacher speaks for longer than is necessary, progress is not as rapid.

The curriculum is evolving extremely well and takes very good account of learners' needs. Care guidance and support is very strong. The academy has established a cooperative culture between staff and students and this helps in developing the curriculum as well as meeting the personal support and development needs of individuals.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The academy is led extremely well by the Principal and the senior leadership team. The leadership at all levels is impressive. This includes student leaders right through to the governing body. The academy challenges convention while building on traditional values. Middle leaders contribute a great deal in the development of the academy and are empowered to make significant contributions, not least of which is the highly developed sense of community and teamwork.

The quality of leadership and management of teaching and learning is strong and has already set and met high standards of practice in the classroom. Leaders have an accurate and precise understanding of strengths in the teaching team and have robustly tackled the areas of development identified. They understand the need to refine lessons further so that the student experience is even better. They are also clear about the need to maintain the current high standards as the academy grows.

The governing body has supported the academy very well in bringing it to this point. It challenges leaders and is aware of the need to refine its practice to ensure that it gains further independent evidence of the work the academy does. There are clear plans to develop the sixth form and this has proven to be highly popular with prospective students. The impact, enthusiasm and professionalism in the academy demonstrate a very strong capacity to continue its development.

External support

Leaders are making effective use of help and support from a wide range of sources. Support from the local authority is effective. The academy is effective in identifying where external support can help them and in obtaining this.

Main Judgements

The academy has made **outstanding** progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by refining further the use of personalised learning strategies in the classroom

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

Paul Scott

Her Majesty's Inspector

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