

Tribal
1-4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

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

Direct T 0117 3115319
Direct F 0117 3150430
Direct email: matthew.parker@tribalgroup.com

16 September 2011

Mrs Helen Mathieson
Principal
Marine Academy Plymouth
Trevithick Road
Plymouth
PL5 2AF

Dear Mrs Mathieson

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Marine Academy Plymouth

Introduction

Following my visit with John Seal HMI to your academy on 14-15 September 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 principal, the senior leadership team, middle managers, groups of students, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, and representatives of the sponsors.

Context

Marine Academy opened in September 2010, following the closure of Tamarside Community College. It is sponsored by the University of Plymouth, Cornwall College and Plymouth City Council and has a marine specialism. The academy is average-sized with 949 students on roll. It serves an area of social challenge, including significant unemployment. Nearly one third of students are entitled to free school meals. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage and very few use English as an additional language. One third of the students are registered as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A new principal took up her post when the academy opened. Staff initially transferred from the predecessor school and a

restructuring programme took place during the academy's first year of opening. Previously sixth formers received their provision through a local post -16 confederation and travelled to different locations within the Plymouth area. Since the start of the new academic year, the majority of post 16 education is now provided at the academy.

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

Students' attainment on entry to the academy is low and there is a substantial legacy of underachievement in all year groups. A high proportion of students arrive at the academy with reading and writing skills well below those expected for their age and their vocabulary is limited. Since the academy opened there has been a strong focus on developing students' literacy skills and a specific programme has been introduced to improve reading levels, particularly with boys. Students are making good progress in their reading and the academy leaders recognise that there needs to be an emphasis on writing and presentation skills.

The academy's tracking systems demonstrate that the rate of progress made by students is accelerating. Good progress has been made towards the challenging targets that have been set for each year group. In its first year of opening, the academy has made a promising start to raising standards. National examination results for 2011 indicate that 38% of students gained five or more A* to C GCSE grades which exceeds the national minimum expectation. The academy has identified that students' achievement has been inconsistent. For instance, girls' attainment is better than boys, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities have underachieved and those who are gifted and talented have not reached their full potential. This is being rectified by ensuring that all students are fully included into the life of the academy and provided with skilfully targeted personalised intervention. A very rigorous system of reviews with individual teachers ensures that students' progress is monitored regularly.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The academy has very successfully secured a foundation for life-long learning and the students' eagerness to engage is demonstrated in their positive attitudes. Students explain that they are proud of their new school uniform which they feel makes them 'look smarter and ready to learn'. The local community notice the difference in student attitudes and take time to share this with the academy. For example, two local residents contacted the academy to explain 'how nice to see most of your students in uniform and obviously proud to wear the same. They are also very mannerly'. Punctuality for lessons is good, attendance rates have significantly improved and are now average. There have been no permanent exclusions and fixed term exclusions are kept to a minimum. Students enjoy school and particularly appreciate 'more school trips – educational and treats for good learning'. Behaviour is good and students move around the academy sensibly. They have a good awareness of the needs of others, support each other in their work and appreciate 'being part of the Student Voice because we can meet up and talk about

what changes we would like to happen'. Students feel safe in the academy but report that they do not always know who to contact if they have a worry or concern. Students talk enthusiastically about the wealth of marine opportunities that they are involved in. For example, water sports are a firm favourite and participation in adventurous activities such as the 'Tall Ships' prepares them well for future challenges.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching and learning were good or better in three-quarters of the lessons seen and no inadequate lessons were observed. Lesson planning is consistent because teachers use a common framework to plan sessions. The purposes of the lessons are clearly identified and students are given guidance on how to evaluate their learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and the 100 minute sessions are generally accepted well by students because 'it enables us to focus and learn a lot more'. This was demonstrated well in a high quality music session where the teaching staff could teach and model the chords required to produce 'Blues' music. Students then had plenty of time to practice these on keyboards and guitars. This was then followed up with an opportunity to perform their work together. Teachers skilfully explain to students what they need to work towards to gain the expected level and above and assessment is developing well as an integral part of the learning process. Verbally, teachers provide in-depth feedback on their students work. Although some good examples of marking were seen, its use is inconsistent and does not always help the students work toward the next step in their learning. Students with behavioural difficulties have their needs met well with clear strategies for teachers to use which meet individual needs.

The impact of the academy's specialism on raising students' achievements is good. The curriculum is broad with strengths in training and study programmes linked to the specialism of the school. Sponsors subsidise cross-curricular experiences in science, engineering, and sailing experiences both locally and nationally. Courses are not only tailored to support literacy and numeracy skills but enable students to gain nationally recognised qualifications in marine-based activities. University based subject specific expertise and high quality resources are used extremely well to enhance the students learning experiences.

Teachers know their students well and relationships between them are good. Great attention is given to Year 7 induction and students are proud of the way that the university 'adopts' them after their first month at the academy. Guidance for key Stage 4 and post-16 options are carefully discussed so that teachers can ensure that students follow the courses that match their needs. Strong links with specialist agencies ensure that those students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are given appropriate support. Students who are gifted and talented in specific subject areas are benefiting from lessons with other year groups and opportunities to attend sessions at the university.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal provides an extremely focused and convincing direction for the academy. Her vision for the academy is inspirational. She has created a mutually supportive leadership team who share a sense of purpose and integrity, and an ambition to improve. It has been necessary for some decisive and difficult actions to be taken but the impact of the effective leadership is clearly seen in the improving outcomes of attendance, behaviour, attainment and progress.

The academy has a good capacity to improve. A strong infrastructure is now in place, with a well understood cycle of monitoring, planning, implementation and evaluation. This is clearly linked to performance management for staff and professional development. Effective systems have been put in place to ensure that students' achievements are kept under review. Self-evaluation systems are embedded into the work of the academy and accurately inform priorities for development. The senior leadership team and the governing body are astutely aware of the academy's strengths and shortcomings. Strategic planning is clear, targeted on those areas in most urgent need of change and is constantly monitored.

The sponsors have a commitment to improving the lives of the whole community and the academy is part of that vision. Communications with home have increased and this ensures that the academy's high expectations are understood by parents and carers.

External support

External support from sponsors has secured a myriad of opportunities for the students and staff to benefit from. The 'virtual highway between Marine Academy and the university' has had a positive impact on both students and staff. For example, the university finances and accredits professional development programmes for staff. It also provides a wide range of experiences for the students, including higher mathematics taster days, language sessions, book projects and marine days. The university also includes the academy within innovative research projects and this enhances the quality of provision. During the initial months of opening, Plymouth City Council provided expert personnel advice and has overseen the creation of the academy's own nursery. Cornwall College supports the construction programme well and provides knowledgeable governors who challenge the work of the school and offer expertise. The academy works in effective partnership with a number of businesses and organisations, notably the National Marine Aquarium and the Southwest Lakes Trust to support the educational experiences of the students. The academy has benefited from the input of the School Improvement Partner who has been a good critical friend.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

The academy should:

- increase the opportunities for students to speak in various settings, offer their ideas, explain their approaches to work and present their work
- strengthen approaches and consistency to marking so as to improve the quality of students' written work, spelling and presentation
- ensure students' awareness and confidence of seeking advice and support from staff.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector