

Tribal Education
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 0845 123 6001
Direct F 0117 315 0430
Direct email: rebecca.jackson@tribalgroup.com

14 October 2011

Ms J Steel
The Principal
The Bourne Academy
Hadow Road
Bournemouth
BH10 5HS

Dear Ms Steel

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of The Bourne Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Christine Raeside HMI to your academy on 12 and 13 October 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, groups of pupils, teachers and the Chair of the Governing Body. They observed 17 part-lessons and made short visits to a further five lessons.

Context

The Bourne Academy, which specialises in English, engineering and design, opened in September 2010. It is sponsored by Canford School, a local independent school. The academy provides education for students in Years 7 to 11, but will offer sixth form provision from September 2013. The academy occupies the site of the predecessor school. A £10 million refurbishment is planned to begin in February 2012. The current Principal took up post in January 2010 in preparation for the academy's opening. Approximately two thirds of the staff joined the academy from the predecessor school, including just over half of the teaching staff. Since the academy opened, five members of staff have been made redundant and the head of

mathematics has left. A new head of mathematics is due to take up post in January 2012. There are currently 541 students on roll. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of students with special educational needs/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is also above average. The academy accepts students of all abilities in an area where there is selective education. While the large majority of students are of White British heritage, there are growing numbers of students from Eastern European families. The proportion of students entering the school other than at the usual time is higher than in other schools nationally.

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

The academy has already had a positive impact in raising attainment. For example, in 2011, 46% of students attained five good grades at GCSE, including both English and mathematics. This represents a 9 percentage point increase on results from the predecessor school in the previous year. Progress in mathematics has accelerated rapidly with the result that the proportion of students who attained GCSE grades A* to C improved to average in 2011, having previously been low. Improved achievement seen in English in the predecessor school has been sustained. Students attained particularly well in religious education, visual arts, performing arts and physical education. Attainment was not fully consistent across subjects, however, and the proportion of students attaining two good qualifications in science remains low. Boys' attainment is rising, although remains lower than that for girls. The academy's own analysis of 2011 results shows that a small number of boys known to be eligible for free school meals attained less well than other students. GCSE results for 2011 indicate that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities made similar progress to their peers.

In the lessons seen, students made satisfactory, and sometimes good, progress. Improvements in behaviour have been central to accelerating students' progress. Students achieve best when teaching ensures that all are fully involved at all stages of the lessons. For example, in one Year 9 English lesson, students made good progress because the teaching demanded that they all participated in paired discussions to evaluate the mood and structure of a given text. Students engaged well with the task because all were made accountable for feeding back their views. As a result, response rates to the whole-class question and answer session were high. Students clearly enjoyed their learning. In some other lessons, levels of engagement are more variable because teaching strategies do not ensure that all learners are fully involved in their learning. In these lessons, answers are too readily accepted from volunteers and it is too easy for less confident students to opt out. When this happens, some students, particularly lower attaining students and sometimes those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, remain too passive in question and answer sessions. The rate of progress of students at the early stages of learning English, and those with weak literacy skills, is accelerating due to specialist curriculum provision. Their progress in other lessons is more variable because not all teachers are equally skilled in providing the necessary support.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students' attitudes and behaviour have improved very dramatically in the academy's first year. Students welcome the robustness of the academy's approach to addressing poor behaviour. One student, typifying the views of many others, commented, 'Now behaviour has improved, we are able to learn properly.' Students also reported that there has been a sharp decline in bullying with the result that they now feel much safer than before. They appreciate the strong support they receive from their tutors and heads of house and know that adults will be quick to help them if they need additional advice or guidance.

The robust approach taken to tackle poor behaviour resulted in very high rates of exclusion in the academy's first year. While exclusions still remain higher than seen in other schools, they are now beginning to decline. This reflects students' improved understanding of how to behave in lessons and around the academy, and the provision which increasingly meets their needs.

Attendance was low in the academy's first year but is now rising and, currently, is significantly higher than at this stage last year. Similarly, the proportion of students who are persistent absentees is reducing from its previous high.

Many students make a positive contribution to the school community. The school council and its various committees are highly valued and are playing a significant part in shaping the direction of the academy. These strategies are proving to be very effective in building students' self-esteem and strengthening their feelings of loyalty to their new school. Students know that their views are taken seriously and respond very well to opportunities to liaise with teachers with regard to, for example, strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The effectiveness of provision

Lessons increasingly benefit from teachers' skills in building strong and positive relationships with students. Teachers are highly committed and lesson planning is extremely detailed. Students appreciate the much greater stability in staffing than they previously experienced and they say they value the continuity of having the same teachers every week. There is some good marking, for example in religious studies, English and history. In these subjects, students can articulate their current level of attainment, their end-of-year target and what they need to do to get there. However, this is not consistent across the academy and is weaker, for example, in science. In some lessons, the quality of marking is not effective in addressing poor standards of presentation.

In the most effective lessons, teaching empowers students to learn independently. For example, in one religious education lesson seen, students responded extremely well to the opportunity to work in teams and design their own rules for an imaginary country, applying the subject-specific expertise they had learned earlier in the

lesson. All groups of students were motivated to do well and the teacher made good use of assessment by listening carefully to student discussions and steering the learning in response to what students were saying. This good use of assessment is not consistent enough, however. In some lessons, teachers are not sufficiently alert to students' emerging confusion or misconceptions. This, in part, is explained by their willingness to take answers too readily from volunteers. This masks the differing levels of understanding of the rest of the group. As a result, students are sometimes asked to move on to the next learning activity before they have fully understood the method they are expected to apply. Not all teachers are equally effective in supporting students with low levels of literacy and in raising their attainment in literacy.

The academy's specialism is making a growing contribution to students' attainment. The decision to focus on English is well conceived, given the higher than usual proportions of students with low levels of literacy. The product design and engineering specialisms link well with local employment opportunities. Good teaching seen in engineering exemplifies the positive contribution the academy's specialist subjects are making to promoting students' future economic well-being. The curriculum is broadening rapidly to be more inclusive and to better meet the needs of a wider range of students. The range of courses offered, including vocational qualifications, is impressive given the academy's small size. Students are well prepared for employment or further education and the proportion of students from last year who are not in education, employment or training is exceptionally low. The 'Aspire' curriculum enhancement days are much enjoyed by students and provide a good model of the active approaches to learning that are sometimes absent in everyday lessons.

Students feel well cared for. Care provided through the house system is enhanced by the considerable expertise of the heads of house who, collectively, have experience in social work, psychotherapy and careers guidance. Students value highly the vertical tutor group system and say that this has strengthened relationships between those from different year groups. This has been an important and successful development in building students' sense of well-being. Students are also well supported through the growing assertive mentoring scheme. This is proving to be increasingly effective in accelerating students' progress, particularly in preparation for external examinations. Good support is provided through after-school sessions to help consolidate students' learning and help prepare them for public examinations. Well-targeted provision directed at vulnerable students, including residential courses, is having a growing impact in improving their well-being and their preparedness to make the most of the opportunities provided by the academy.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The Principal is widely respected by staff and students and has brought energy, vision and a clear sense of direction to the academy. Leaders and managers have steered the academy skilfully through significant difficulties, including staff

redundancies, while maintaining very high staff morale. There is a shared determination among all staff to improve the life chances of all students who attend the academy. Strategies to share the best practice in teaching and learning are developing well and are being strengthened through well-conceived initiatives to share ideas and expertise between and across faculties. While teachers' skills in supporting students with weak literacy skills are too variable, clear plans to build greater consistency in this aspect of teaching and learning are in place and due to be rolled out this term. Leaders and managers have a broadly accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning, although sometimes their judgements are too generous. This is because lesson observations are not always informed by forensic analysis of the impact of teaching on different groups of learners.

Middle leaders are very effective. Monitoring and evaluation of examination results at faculty level are extremely strong and are driven by good analysis of performance data. As a result, heads of faculty have very clear strategies in place to consolidate excellent performance and to address areas of weakness in the aspects for which they are responsible. However, senior leaders and managers recognise that the incisive use of data to inform self-evaluation and improvement planning is not consistent across all areas of the academy's work. For example, leaders and managers do not yet have a clear enough view of the impact of strategies to raise attendance on different groups of learners. Leaders and managers have recognised this weakness and have recruited additional staff – to start in January 2012 – to improve the range and quality of analysis.

The improvements seen so far provide good evidence of the academy's capacity for sustained improvement. Senior staff are supported well by a knowledgeable team of governors with a wide range of skills, including significant financial and business acumen, good links with local employers, and considerable educational expertise. Governors are playing a key role in helping to steer planning for the very significant construction work to improve the academy's infrastructure and facilities, due to begin in February 2012.

External support

The academy has benefited from good external support, including that from the School Improvement Partner, the Specialist Schools and Academy's Trust and Canford School. Well-tailored support from the School Improvement Partner has helped strengthen self-evaluation and contributed to identify the next steps in planning. Funding from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust has helped to strengthen the quality of provision in mathematics, particularly by securing high-quality teaching during a period of staff turbulence. Links with Canford School are developing well, with increased opportunities for students from both schools to work together, including specific initiatives linked to the academy's specialism. Staff in smaller departments are developing their expertise through growing links with other schools.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Strengthen the quality of teaching and learning across the academy, by:
 - ensuring that teachers make much sharper use of assessment information to plan learning activities which fully meet the needs of the whole group, including those with lower levels of literacy
 - ensuring that teachers monitor the progress of all groups of students more effectively during lessons so that teaching can be tailored accordingly
 - sharing the best practice seen in promoting high quality and well-planned opportunities for students to learn independently and collaboratively.

- Strengthen self-evaluation and strategic planning by ensuring that data are analysed thoroughly to provide a clear view of the impact of all aspects of provision on outcomes for different groups of students.

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

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector

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