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Mr Cantwell
Malcolm Arnold Academy
Trinity Avenue
Northampton
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Dear Mr Cantwell

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Malcolm Arnold Academy

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy on 19 - 20 October 2011 with Davinder Dosanjh HMI, 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, nominated staff, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of the sponsor.

Context

The academy opened in September 2010 in the buildings of the predecessor school and is sponsored by the David Ross Foundation. The academy maintains close links with the Diocese of Peterborough. Almost all of the staff from the predecessor school were transferred to the academy. Eleven teachers, including the special needs coordinator have left the academy since it opened; and 17 teachers, including a vice principal, an assistant principal and a teacher in-charge of the designated special provision for hearing impaired students have been appointed.

The academy is larger than the average secondary school. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is more than twice the national average. Similarly, the proportion of students whose first language is not English is three

times the national figure. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. The proportion of students registered by the academy as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is three times the national figure and the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is above the national average. A small number of students in the academy are looked-after by the local authority.

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

The proportion of students securing five higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, is higher, at 34.2%, than that secured by the predecessor school. However, this remains below the minimum target expected for secondary schools. Unusually, the comparator figures for those students in receipt of free school meals, at 40.5%, are more positive than found nationally. These figures were secured after the first year of the academy's operation and still relate to the weaknesses in the students' previous education.

The proportion of students making the expected progress in English (63%) and mathematics (45.6%) are similarly influenced, at least in part, by gaps in the students' prior education. A trend of improvement is evident in all of the academy's examination data, but the 2011 results are below the government's floor targets for secondary schools. The academy is building a programme of examination early entry and this data is more positive.

Learning was good or better in 6 out of 10 lessons visited by HMI. During this inspection a very impressive English intervention week was in progress providing specialist guidance to middle ability students prior to their November entry examinations.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students behave well in and around the academy and report a better working ethos, compared with their recollection of the predecessor school. Students are polite and welcoming and they note that behaviour is much better now because there are clear rules used by most staff. Those students who were interviewed by HMI commented that the behaviour expectations of the new academy provided a huge challenge for some of their peers.

While fixed-term exclusions increased in the first year of operation, this reflects a 'raising of the bar' and a higher expectation of student behaviour. As those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities have higher rates of exclusions the academy has very recently introduced the 'return to learn centre' to support students who are in danger of being excluded. The centre will provide individualised programmes of study and guidance. Current exclusions have declined by 20% from last year.

In the most effective lessons, students are enthusiastic so that good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning make a strong contribution to good learning. In a few lessons behaviour is not managed effectively and students are disengaged because the teaching is not sufficiently challenging. Passive behaviour in some lessons is a barrier to progress.

Attendance is low when compared with the current secondary school average but improving as a result of significant effort. In 2010/11 it was 90.02% and the increase of 2.34% from the predecessor school was a notable achievement; current attendance data continues this trend of improvement. The academy provides the governing body with a weekly key performance indicator on this issue, with the attendance of key groups and year groups reported. Some students are slow getting to lessons after break and lunch. Punctuality remains an issue for some students. The academy meets current safeguarding requirements with regards to the single central register.

The effectiveness of provision

HMI observed 34 lessons and nearly two-thirds were found to be good or better, although one in seven were judged inadequate. The quality of teaching varies widely. There are notable strengths and some examples of outstanding and good practice with strong teaching seen in physical education and English; however, teaching was inconsistent in design and technology, science and mathematics. In the most successful lessons teachers sustain a good pace, and use imaginative activities that are varied and engage students. Teachers plan in detail and make lesson objectives clear and precise, often setting different expectations for students based on different starting points. Teachers use questions skilfully to extend students' answers and to prompt them to think and explain their ideas. Subject vocabulary is emphasised and reinforced through the use of specialised terms.

The least effective lessons failed to provide appropriate challenge so that individuals or groups of students found the work difficult or too easy. In some lessons the teachers' use of assessment did not always take full account of students' prior learning. Similarly, the effectiveness of marking varied between subjects and within some departments. There was no evidence of a clear marking policy. In a minority of lessons teachers have not considered how to deploy teaching assistants to secure good progress. The tracking of student progress and the subsequent use of the wealth of data to guide lesson planning and particular intervention is developing quickly but is still at an early stage.

The curriculum has been enhanced with clear pathways through examination programmes and guidance that students speak of positively. The use of house time to deliver the personal and social education programme and a citizenship half course GCSE is imaginative; Year 9 is considered the foundation year for many GCSE or

vocational courses. The academy is seeking to build a continuity of provision from Year 8 to 12 as it seeks to develop its sixth form. Music provision, one of the academy's specialisms has been significantly enhanced with new resources. However, mathematics, the academy's other specialism has yet to provide a successful and consistent experience for all students. Students enjoy the range of extra curricular activities provided, in particular music and drama. Students in the sixth form are keen to support younger students in their learning and provide additional language support.

Staff know the students well and the academy provides effective care, guidance and support. Procedures for pastoral care are very clear and well organised. House managers play a key role in supporting students and there is a strong caring ethos. The designated special provision for students with hearing impairment ensures students are well-integrated into the school with specialised and effective support in lessons.

There is a new faculty, the Malcolm Arnold Achievement Centre which is bringing together all the support for those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, the gifted and talented, students whose first language is not English and the designated hearing impaired special provision. This provides improved co-ordination and a central referral system which is addressing previous weaknesses, particularly in the co-ordination of support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Small access groups are running in Year 7 to improve the literacy skills of students.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

Much has been achieved in the academy's first year. The principal and his senior team have embedded ambition and drive improvement relentlessly; the challenge they have accepted is significant. The academy's self-evaluation is precise and decisions are well thought through. The weekly Key Performance Indicators data sheet, provided for the governing body, is a model of commercial practice that offers a great deal to education. The 'Improving Teaching Programme' and 'Outstanding Teaching Programme' are supporting a coaching model of improvement. There are some variations in the effectiveness of middle managers which will require further guidance. The senior team has a proven capacity for improvement

External support

The governing body and senior staff select the external support they perceive appropriate in order to build capacity or to offer specialist insight. An example of this effective strategy was the post 16 review commissioned from the University of Northampton.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that attendance reaches the level expected in secondary schools.
- Eliminate the remaining inadequate teaching.
- Ensure that the Malcolm Arnold Achievement Centre allows for the effective monitoring of student progress and the impact of intervention programmes.

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

David Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

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

Once the school has had 24 hours to report any factual inaccuracies, the post-inspection letter is copied as appropriate to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- DfE - Academies Group colin.diamond@education.gsi.gov.uk

The letters should also be copied electronically to:

paul.brooker@ofsted.gov.uk - the HMI with national responsibility for academies
each member of the inspection team,
the PO for SCC
ACADInspectionReports@ypla.gov.uk