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7 November 2011

Mr J Pendlebury
Principal
Enterprise South Liverpool Academy
Heath Road Campus
Heath Road
Liverpool
L19 4TN

Dear Mr Pendlebury,

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Enterprise South Liverpool Academy

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy on Thursday 3 and Friday 4 November 2011 with Jane Jones HMI, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, one of the vice-principals, senior members of staff, one group of students from Years 7 to 9 and two groups from Years 10 to 13, and three governors, who included the Chair of the Governing Body and representatives of the sponsors. Inspectors observed 14 lessons, carried out two learning walks and scrutinised samples of students' work. Of the lessons observed, five were carried out jointly with senior staff.

Context

The academy is a specialist enterprise and business academy with a further specialism in languages for business. It opened in September 2010. All staff with the exception of the Principal, one of the vice-principals and the chaplain transferred from the two predecessor schools. The academy's sponsors are Enterprise, the University of Liverpool, the Diocese of Liverpool, the Archdiocese of Liverpool, and Liverpool City Council. The academy operates on two sites: the Horrocks Avenue site for students in Years 7 to 9 and the Heath Road site for students in Years 10 to 13. The academy is due to move into new buildings on the Horrocks Avenue site in 2013.

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The academy has 789 students on roll in Years 7 to 11 and 155 in the sixth form. Just over one third of the student population is made up of girls. A high proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students from a minority ethnic background is about half of that found nationally. A higher than average proportion of students has special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

The academy received its first set of GCSE results in summer 2011. Eighty two per cent of students attained five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C. The figure of 40% for those attaining this standard including English and mathematics was in line with targets set and broadly similar to the combined figure attained by the predecessor schools in 2010. Six per cent of students, however, did not manage to attain one pass at grade A*-G and, in the sixth form, pass rates on AS and A-Level courses were low, particularly in psychology, biology and mathematics.

The skills and abilities of students on entry to the academy as represented by end of Key Stage 2 assessments are wide-ranging. Generally, though, they are improving and, in more recent years have nudged towards being broadly average, although lower in Year 7. This is presenting challenges to the academy's leaders in their development of a more rigorous approach to using this information coupled with their own assessments in order to set challenging yet realistic targets for students. There is, as a result of the developing nature of this work, an inconsistent approach by staff in using data to plan and teach lessons that meet the differing needs of students. This was most evident in the scrutiny of students' work which indicated variability in the attainment expected of students and the progress they were making. In Key Stage 3, for example, students responded well to the high expectations of them in lessons focusing on the enterprise specialism. The written work of students in such sessions indicates clearly their ability to use skills in literacy and numeracy to, for example, link learning in cookery to visits to organic farms and consider issues of transportation. By contrast, the written work of students in English lessons in Key Stage 3 or students with special educational needs and/or disabilities sometimes reflected expectations that were not as high, resulting in low-level tasks being completed. This, in part, is owing to the quality of lesson planning which, while improving in consistency, is variable. While most plans identified that some students had special educational needs and/or disabilities, few teachers modified activities or resources to ensure students' individual needs were met.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students spoken with during the course of this monitoring inspection were polite and well-mannered. Generally, they behaved in an orderly fashion around both sites and mixed happily with each other, although a few tended to congregate on the stairs. They were adamant that bullying of any sort, including that of a racist or homophobic nature, does not occur at the academy and were equally confident that such issues would be dealt with immediately. Students' behaviour in lessons during this inspection was variable. While it was at least good in some lessons owing to strong relationships developed by teachers and

interesting, challenging work, it was not good enough in two lessons observed and led to inadequate learning. The attendance of students is rising overall as a result of well-received rewards, incentives to promote 100% attendance and a sharp focus from leaders.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching observed by inspectors varied from outstanding to inadequate. In the best lessons, including an outstanding English lesson in Year 10 and an equally high quality all-day art and design-based session in Year 7 as part of the academy's 'Creating Futures' programme, the enthusiasm and high expectations of teachers captured and held students' interest very well. In such sessions, exceptionally well-sequenced learning was planned for carefully. In addition, skilful questioning checked and probed students' understanding, and encouraged meaningful discussion. Teachers and other adults circulated while students tackled a variety of challenging activities, spotting misconceptions, providing timely one-to-one interventions, and sometimes using mini-plenaries to make key teaching points. As a result, students in Year 10 were able to identify strengths and weaknesses in their own and each others' speaking and listening skills in order to begin to set their own challenging targets for improvement. Other positive features of the better teaching included the promotion of literacy and oracy skills and the good use of the interactive whiteboard. Strong relationships between teachers, teaching assistants and students encouraged engagement and promoted confidence in low-attaining or vulnerable students.

Weaknesses in the teaching included a lack of attention to developing students' understanding of important concepts so that they were reliant on following the teacher's method rather than thinking for themselves. Independent work was insufficiently challenging. In a few lessons, students' lack of engagement turned into low-level disruption which slowed their own and others' progress.

Academy leaders have worked to improve teachers' use of assessment to support learning but recognise there is much more to do. The quality of marking varies with the best identifying how work might be improved. Not all teachers, however, are following the academy's policy for providing good quality feedback. Sometimes, incorrect work is ticked and comments are limited to praise or criticism of effort. While each student has targets for their attainment, these are too often overly ambitious which means that tracking data do not distinguish well enough between underachievement and satisfactory or even good progress. This issue is compounded by inconsistencies and inaccuracies in teachers' assessment of students' work using National Curriculum sub-levels. However, the academy's policy of departmental moderation of students' work is a useful step in improving this. Self-assessment is in the early stages: some is superficial while other more helpful models use student-friendly criteria.

The strategic development of the curriculum is providing pathways that better meet students' diverse needs and abilities in each key stage. Leaders recognise that the impact of these developments on students' attainment will need to be evaluated rigorously. The emphasis on vocational courses in the two predecessor schools in Key Stage 4 and the sixth

form is being broadened and supplemented appropriately by pathways that offer traditional academic subjects. This shift is coupled with a clear focus on improving attainment in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science in Key Stages 3 and 4. 'Creating Futures' lessons in Year 7 and 'Enterprising Minds' in Year 8, both relating to the academy's enterprise specialism, are making a significant contribution to students' enjoyment and achievement, including the development of their literacy skills. The most vulnerable students in Key Stage 3, who experience a range of learning, behavioural and emotional difficulties, receive provision that supports their personal and academic development. At Key Stage 4, the academy has improved the arrangements for the alternative education provided for those students who struggle to cope with full-time provision. The sixth-form curriculum includes a range of traditional and vocational options. In 2011, students achieved more strongly on the vocational courses overall. Improved guidance and stricter application of stipulated pre-requisites has ensured that students currently in Year 12 are better equipped to succeed on their chosen courses. Leaders recognise more robust systems need to be developed to ensure students are making the progress they should.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

Leaders have ensured the aims of the academy are clear, understood and shared across both sites and among the two previously different staff teams. They are being suitably supported in this important work in the early days of the academy's life by the governing body which is equally clear about the potential of the specialisms to enhance the students' employability. Leaders are focused on raising standards through establishing the right curriculum for all students, the highest quality teaching, and ensuring that the best quality learning support is taking shape and setting the right conditions for learning; however all leaders recognise more is to be done. Senior leaders have correctly identified that they by themselves cannot achieve these aims and have embarked on a programme of developing leadership across the academy. Curriculum directors are taking increased responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects and for the standards students attain, although the level of this accountability is not consistent.

Leaders have devised a number of mechanisms and strategies to gain an overview of the academy's effectiveness. These strategies, which include making use of external evaluations and developing advanced skills teachers, coupled with an open and honest approach to improvement, have helped the two predecessor schools to come together as one. At this stage, though, and while leaders are demonstrating they have the capacity to secure the improvements necessary, the academy's overall self-evaluation and that of individual departments are generally too positive because they focus on actions taken rather than their impact on students' learning and development. Two examples illustrate this. First, while leaders had identified the need to improve provision and outcomes in science, they had not pinpointed the nature and extent of weaknesses in mathematics. In particular, the teaching in this subject does not consistently seek to develop students' understanding or ensure depth and progression in learning. Scrutiny of students' work showed many exercises are repetitive and that students have too few opportunities to solve problems. Second, the quality of teaching observed by inspectors does not match the profile of teaching suggested

by the academy's own records. Nevertheless, the senior leaders with whom inspectors conducted joint lesson observations were accurate in their judgements and in their identification of strengths and weaknesses within each lesson. A key area for development for senior and middle leaders is to ensure sufficient emphasis is placed on the impact of the teaching on students' learning and progress within the lesson and over time as well as paying closer attention to subject-specific features of the teaching and learning.

External support

The academy's sponsors are clear in their vision for the academy in the community and through their involvement in the governing body are providing robust support and challenge to leaders. In recognition of the potential difficulties of bringing two schools from different communities into one academy, the Principal and leaders have made use of a number of partners, including the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and external consultants. Leaders have accepted willingly the challenge and professional development opportunities, for example for middle leaders, that their partners have brought.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress although this monitoring inspection has raised some concerns relating to learning and progress in mathematics.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve learning and progress in mathematics by ensuring:
 - teaching in lessons focuses on developing understanding as well as skills
 - sequences of lessons bring depth and progression in learning
 - students are presented with increased opportunities to solve a range of problems.
- Improve outcomes for students in the sixth form by developing robust systems to ensure students are making the progress they should.
- Increase teachers' awareness of the impact of their teaching on students' learning by:
 - sharpening the focus on subject-specific feedback
 - pinpointing in written records of lesson observations what students have learned and what needs to be improved.

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

Yours sincerely,

Mark Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

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