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Philomena Hogg
Principal
Brighton Aldridge Community Academy
Lewes Road
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Dear Ms Hogg

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Brighton Aldridge Community Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Christine Jones HMI to your academy on 8 and 9 November, 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, staff in positions of responsibility, groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the sponsors.

Context

The academy is smaller than most secondary schools and opened in September 2010 to replace Falmer High School. It occupied the original buildings for the first year before moving into new ones at the start of this academic year, when a sixth form also opened. It has specialisms in entrepreneurship and sport. Most students transferred from the predecessor school. About half of the staff also transferred but the leadership team, including the Principal, was new. The proportions of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including statements of special educational need, or who are eligible for free school meals, are greater than

found nationally. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is lower than average. The academy has a 16-place speech and language unit.

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

Students' progress is accelerating well in lessons and over time. They are starting to reverse their slow past progress and low attainment on entry. Unvalidated Year 11 examination results this summer rose markedly in key subjects such as English and mathematics and vocational courses including sport, when compared to the year before at the previous school. Students' targets are now much more challenging. Their attainment remains well below national averages but the gap is closing securely. Weak literacy and numeracy skills remain significant barriers to progress. Increasingly effective help for the students furthest behind age-related expectations, or with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is ensuring they are catching up with their peers. More-able students are making better progress, although they are not yet achieving as much as they could. Students are starting to enjoy learning more. They make good progress in the higher proportion of lessons which now include engaging tasks and regular discussions to clarify the progress made and the next steps needed. Where they have to listen for too long without active participation, or are not clear about the purpose of their work, students' progress is slow.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour and attendance are improving quickly and supporting students' better achievement. Attendance is rising overall but most notably among those who were regularly absent. Students are more punctual to school and to lessons. While some find it difficult to behave well without support, the majority respond appropriately to the academy's high expectations for behaviour. The numbers excluded have fallen sharply in the last year. Students feel safe and say that incidents, including bullying, are dealt with well by staff. Most students approach learning positively, with growing belief that they can succeed. However, their ability to learn independently is at an early stage of development. While they increasingly want to show entrepreneurial attributes such as determination, many lack confidence in moving their own learning forward. A widening range of opportunities, such as representing the academy in charity outreach activities, enables more students to contribute to their community.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching is improving well and staff show enthusiasm and commitment. Effective learning is more evident in lessons but not consistently enough to ensure students make good or better progress all the time. Much-improved assessment systems mean students' progress toward challenging targets is securely checked. Those requiring urgent intervention to tackle poor progress are receiving it, for example via individual coaching in reading. The academy is rightly focused on achieving high

quality day-to-day teaching to reduce the need for such provision. The improved assessment data support lesson planning. However, variability in teachers' use of assessment explains the inconsistent pace of learning. In the better lessons students know why they are undertaking tasks and how to assess their progress. Staff plan work at varying levels to meet students' differing needs and check their progress with strategies such as students holding coloured flashcards to signal understanding, or through skilled questioning. Weakness in these same areas characterises the less effective lessons and reflects teachers' varied skills in using assessment to support learning. It explains why students in some lessons are not able to assess their own work and move on. Most students know their long-term goals and receive regular guidance for improvement via marking. There is a growing expectation that they respond to this but do not do so consistently enough to ensure marking makes full impact.

The curriculum is adapted effectively to support students in vital areas such as literacy and numeracy. Sensible adjustments for students of differing ability are provided through curriculum routes, with more vocational or academic options. Most students feel these serve them well, although some want wider subject choices at Key Stage 4. There is effective alternative provision for disaffected students which includes work-based learning. The new sixth form is welcomed by students, with courses well planned to meet their needs, including through links with another academy. The influence of the specialisms is growing. Participation in sport is widening and activities make a strong contribution to partnerships such as students working with local universities and a football club. There are increasing enrichment activities to foster students' entrepreneurship. Here, too, students work with external partners, including businesses. However, although entrepreneurial skills are referred to in most lessons, teachers do not all know how support them. In some lessons they are skilfully embedded, while in others the tasks lack real purpose and thereby hinder students' attempts, for example, to solve problems for themselves.

Alongside improving teaching, better care, guidance and support are aiding students' behaviour, attitudes and attendance. Students are well known by staff and their needs monitored carefully. The student managers are playing a valuable role with all students but particularly those whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. Effective work with external agencies such as social services is improving issues like attendance. The academy is working hard to enhance communication with parents and carers. Support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is increasingly well targeted, for example, with additional adults deployed to better effect in more lessons. The learning support centre is succeeding in helping students who have difficulty behaving well, so that fewer are excluded. Students from the speech and language centre are making better progress because of improved coordination and planning for their learning in mainstream lessons and in specific support sessions.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The academy's good rate of improvement arises from determined leadership by the Principal and the senior team and testifies to a good capacity to go further. They have ambitious goals for the students and are well focused on achieving them. Those in middle leadership positions, such as subject leaders, are making a growing but as yet inconsistent impact on their areas of responsibility. There are clear systems for holding staff to account for their impact on students. Strategic planning sets precise and appropriate targets which are filtering down into individual aspects of the academy's work. Self-evaluation is accurate. It draws on robust monitoring of teaching and assessment data to check the impact being made on students. The outcomes are used well to refine development planning and staff training, wherein good use is made of external partners such as other schools. The monitoring of teaching in individual subjects is improving through training for subject leaders. However, it is not yet good enough to achieve consistent excellence, including in ensuring entrepreneurial behaviour is properly promoted. The governing body has high expectations and provides a good balance of challenge and support for staff, based on an accurate awareness of progress. Safeguarding students is a high priority for the academy, with secure leadership of the area emanating from the governors.

External support

The academy sponsor makes a good impact through challenge and support. Significant curriculum enrichment is enabled through links with business and enterprise and growing links with other academies sharing the same sponsor. The academy's leaders and governors ensure that support is well coordinated. Monitoring is accurate and perceptive, with a close focus on outcomes for the students.

Main judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

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

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc Chair of the Governing Body
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