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30 November 2011

Mr Chris Coady
The Principal
North Shore Health Academy
Junction Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS19 9LY

Dear Mr Coady

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to North Shore Health Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Wendy Ripley HMI to your academy on 28 and 29 November 2011, 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 first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal and vice-principal, senior and middle leaders, teachers, groups of students, the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body who also represented the lead sponsors, and an external consultant who was previously the School Improvement Partner. They visited 21 lessons and six 'learning live' enrichment sessions.

Context

North Shore Health Academy is sponsored by the National Health Service (NHS), Stockton-on-Tees, the Stockton College Consortium and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council. The academy is smaller than average and is located about three miles north of the town centre. It replaces two previous schools, Blakeston School Community Sports College and Norton School Humanities College. The Principal and vice principal have been in charge since its opening in September 2010. Apart from the director of finance, they were the only new staff appointed to the academy on its inception. Almost all teaching and support staff transferred to the academy from the predecessor schools. Since that time staff turnover has been high. Forty-two members of staff left the academy last year. Levels of staff absence are very high and as a result there has been much use of supply teachers. The academy operates from the buildings of one of its predecessor schools. A major building programme is due to start in February 2012 and is scheduled for completion in March 2013.

September 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

There are currently 661 students on roll which is a decline from the combined total enrolled at the predecessor schools and well short of the proposed 1050 capacity of the new academy. The number of students who enrolled into Year 7 fell in 2010 but rose in September 2011. Almost all students are of White British heritage and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is lower than in most secondary schools. A high proportion of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is around average. Many students have been identified as having behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and significant difficulties with literacy and numeracy. A high proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals.

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

In 2011, GCSE examination results were below floor standards. Only 32% of students in Year 11 attained five or more GCSE grades at A* to C including English and mathematics, which is significantly lower than the national average. During 2010-2011, strategies to raise students' attainment failed for several reasons, including students' poor attendance and behaviour and the high proportion of teaching and learning that was not good enough. Progress was severely hampered by the instability of staffing and the turbulent circumstances of the academy's formation. This year, the academy hopes to reach the floor standard. However, given students' current attendance levels, behaviour and the weak quality of some teaching, inspectors are not confident that this goal will be achieved. There is wide variation in success between subjects and some results are very low: for example, only 9% of students gained an A* to C grade in history and only 7% of the 59 students taking additional applied science gained an A* to C grade. There is a significant gap between the attainment of those students known to be eligible for free school meals and their peers. Girls outperform boys in most areas, although this is not the case in mathematics where the trend is reversed. In the school's specialist science and health related subjects, standards are lower than the national average. In 2011, no students gained a grade A* or A in English literature, French, geography, history, home economics, mathematics and additional applied science.

Results show that the proportion of Year 11 students who made the expected progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 in English, mathematics and science fell when compared to the predecessor schools and was significantly lower than the national average. Only 19% made three levels of progress in science, 25% in mathematics and 42% in English. At the end of its first year of operation, the academy evaluated achievement as inadequate, although it believes that the quality of students' learning is improving this year. In the lessons observed, most students made only satisfactory gains in their skills, knowledge and understanding. This will not enable them to catch up on previous underachievement. The progress of many students is constrained by weak literacy skills. The academy is focussed on improving this. There are signs that intervention is beginning to have a better impact and more is being done to improve students' mathematical skills. However, these initiatives are not firmly embedded across the curriculum and have not had sufficient time to demonstrate the desired effect. According to teachers' assessment, the proportion of students who made

better than expected progress in Key Stage 3 was very high last year, but leaders are unsure if teachers' assessments are accurate and have plans in place to improve standardisation.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Overall, attendance was very low last year at 88.9%. It currently stands at 90.1% although there is considerable variation between year groups. Attendance is better in Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4. The proportion of students who are persistently absent has been reduced but remains very high when compared with most schools. Strategies are in place to improve attendance, including the use of fixed penalty notices through the local authority and a revised range of rewards for good attendance. At present the academy has not fully evaluated the effectiveness of these strategies. Punctuality to school and lessons remains problematic; too many students are late, but there are some signs of improvement this term.

Last year, a large number of students were excluded on a fixed-term basis for serious incidents of verbal or physical abuse against staff or other students. Fixed-term exclusions have increased as a result of the 'zero-tolerance' approach adopted to tackle current behavioural problems. Internal short-term isolations and fixed term isolations have been reduced, but the number of lessons disrupted by poor behaviour remains high. A significant number of students are referred to the academy's internal exclusion unit. This centre has too little sustained impact on improving behaviour and many students are referred there on multiple occasions. Behaviour tends to be very poor in lessons taught by supply staff. In higher sets, students' behaviour is more positive and constructive: however, even in these classes a significant minority of students engage in off-task chatter or are too passive and bored by their work. The academy has placed emphasis on implementing better behaviour management strategies during lesson changeovers, lunch- and break-times. To some extent this is beginning to work but, despite the increased presence of pastoral staff, behaviour around the site remains of concern. Boisterous behaviour in corridors is common place; many students dawdle between lessons often consulting their mobile phones. Most students told inspectors that they feel safe, although younger pupils were generally less positive than their older peers. They complained about behaviour in lessons, particularly those taught by supply teachers and felt frequent change to teachers was disrupting their learning. In a survey of 435 students carried out by the academy in May 2010, only 34% of students thought lessons were interesting and helped them to learn.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching observed varied significantly. There are some examples of good practice. However, there are still too many lessons in which students make inadequate progress. There are many reasons for this: in the most extreme cases it is because students refuse to engage in learning. In other instances, teachers' lesson planning is inadequate because plans focus too much on what teaching techniques are employed rather than what students of differing abilities will learn. In the better lessons, students from across the ability

range behave well and relationships between students and teachers are good. Students respond well to interesting learning activities that are personalised to meet their needs. They enjoy practical and challenging independent learning activities. Whole-class teaching is often unsuccessful because it does not meet the needs of students with widely varying ability levels. Students' literacy needs are not always well supported either in class or through marking. Curriculum developments, such as the 'Inspiring Healthy Minds' and 'Learning Live' initiatives, are improving students' engagement and enjoyment particularly in Key Stage 3. However, it is too early to see any impact of these developments on raising achievement.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

Since their arrival, the Principal and vice-principal have faced many challenges. The most significant of these resulted from the extremely short timescales that were imposed to close the predecessor schools and open the new academy. It was impossible to put in place many of the necessary measures needed to promote adequate learning for the initial stage of the academy's life. Senior leaders are dedicated to establishing the academy's vision and have tried to tackle the most difficult problems head-on. They do not deny that significant weaknesses remain and described them accurately in the draft self-evaluation document. Ambitious and challenging targets have been set for the next phase of the academy's development. In its first year, the systems used to track students' progress were inconsistently applied across departments. It was, therefore, very difficult to accurately identify underperformance and put appropriate intervention in place. More robust systems to collect data have been introduced this year although the analysis and interpretation of information remains an area for improvement.

Until very recently much of the Principal's time has been devoted to ensuring the new building project is confirmed. Practical management issues associated with high levels of staff turnover and sickness have been very time-consuming. Leaders are gradually building capacity amongst middle managers to improve the quality of provision; however, much work remains to be done. Considerable professional development has been put in place to improve the quality of teaching but as yet this has had little impact on improving learning.

The academy has yet to fully develop a system to evaluate robustly its strengths and weaknesses. The implementation of the 2010-11 development plans did not result in the desired improvements in several key areas of the academy's work. Leaders' capacity to improve standards has been severely restricted by the circumstances that they inherited and continues to be severely affected by the many challenges that remain unresolved.

The lead sponsor, Stockton-on-Tees NHS Primary Care Trust will cease to exist in March 2013. The trustees are considering potential succession arrangements with a focus on ensuring the health specialism is retained. Members of the governing body continue to be very supportive of the leaders of the academy but agree that they face many challenges to overcome its serious weaknesses and achieve their ambitions for students.

External support

The School Improvement Partner from the Young People's Learning Agency provided a clear and rigorous appraisal of the challenges the academy faced during the first year of its existence. The Open Academies Education Advisor visited the academy in November 2011 and identified many of the serious areas of concern found by inspectors. A variety of external consultants have worked with academy staff to identify weaknesses and help improve the quality of teaching. Despite this support, there has yet to be significant improvement to outcomes for students and the quality of provision.

Main Judgements

The academy's exceptionally slow progress in improving outcomes for students has raised very serious concerns about the standard of education provided and I am recommending a further monitoring inspection visit as soon as possible.

Priorities for further improvement

Improve students' behaviour and the impact this has on learning by:

- ensuring pastoral interventions and the work of the internal exclusion unit result in measurable and sustained improvements to students' attitudes to learning
- ensuring all staff take a consistent and suitably robust approach to the management of poor behaviour
- providing teachers with more practical support in lessons to promote good behaviour
- ensuring more middle leaders act as role models in managing behaviour.

■ **Improve students' attendance by:**

- analysing the reasons for low attendance in more detail and developing an action plan to bring about more rapid improvement
- analysing students' views on their enjoyment of lessons and taking action to ensure this improves
- building upon the new curriculum initiatives and specialism to enable more students to enjoy school
- continuing to take robust action to ensure persistent absence is reduced.

■ **Improve the quality of teaching by:**

- giving teachers in high-performing departments more time to share good practice in departments where standards are low
- ensuring all teachers plan learning activities effectively so that they meet the needs and interests of different groups of students, including the more-able

- personalising the support given to teachers to enable them to apply the generic professional development they have received more effectively in the particular context of the academy.

■ **Improve the capacity of the academy to improve by;**

- reducing the proportion of teaching carried out by supply or temporary staff
- embedding the new systems used to track performance across all departments
- developing the ability of middle managers to contribute to a robust self-evaluation process
- ensuring that the governing body and trustees take a more proactive approach to supporting and challenging the performance of leaders and managers
- identifying a new lead trustee to ensure smooth transition arrangements are in place.

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

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Johnson
Her Majesty's Inspector