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Mr P Grainger
The Principal
All Saints Church of England Academy
Pennycross
Plymouth
PL5 3NE

Dear Mr Grainger

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of All Saints Church of England Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Ian Hodgkinson, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 17 and 18 January 2012, 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 students, staff, and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body.

Context

The academy opened on 1 September 2010. It is of similar size to most secondary schools. The number of students on roll is 974, including 250 in the sixth form. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is high, as is the number of students who enter the academy at times other than in Year 7. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is below average, although the percentage of students who speak English as an additional language is in line with the national average. The proportion of students with disabilities and/or special educational needs is greater than in most schools. The proportion of students with a

statement of special educational needs is average. Most of the staff in the predecessor school transferred to the academy. While staffing is stable, the academy has experienced difficulty in recruiting mathematics teachers. Its specialist subjects are business and enterprise, and mathematics. The new school building is on track for completion in September 2013.

Pupils' achievement

Satisfactory progress has been made in improving students' achievement. Students enter the academy with standards of attainment that are well below those found in most secondary schools. Their reading ages are particularly low. They attain well below average standards at GCSE when English and mathematics are included, although their attainment meets the floor standard set by the government. While the levels of progress that students make are well below the national average in English and mathematics, they are well above average in science. This is because science teachers make good use of students' targets and assessment to match lessons closely to the range of students' abilities. In addition, the teachers' marking informs students of the specific steps they need to take to improve their work. Students, particularly boys, say they enjoy practical investigations in science, and the opportunities for research and for discussing their views in some other lessons. This is beginning to enable boys to catch up with the better rates of progress achieved by girls. Good practice in using targets and assessment, and in providing opportunities to develop independent learning skills, is evident in an increasing number of lessons. However, it is too inconsistent across and within subjects to promote good progress and raise attainment across the whole academy. The inconsistency in the use of targets and assessment is also evident in the sixth form and leads to uneven achievement. Whereas, in 2011, GCE A-level results improved, AS-level attainment declined.

Improvements in intervention programmes for children who are looked after, students with disabilities and those with special educational needs ensure they progress as well as, and often better than, their peers. For example, a programme in phonics (letters and sounds) is supporting less able readers to develop appropriate reading skills.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students' behaviour is improving well as a result of higher expectations and more consistent behaviour management by all staff. Consequently, the number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced and there were no permanent exclusions in the last academic year. Students demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, particularly in lessons that engage them in activities that challenge their thinking and application of independent learning skills. Behaviour around the school site is generally orderly. Students say they feel safe. They know how to keep safe and they appreciate the fact that there are always teachers and other staff to turn to if they have any

concerns. They demonstrate good awareness of different forms of bullying and how to counter them. Attendance has improved markedly from the start of the academic year, when it was below average, due to more rigorous monitoring and action taken by senior leaders. Most students are punctual to lessons.

The effectiveness of provision

The academy has made satisfactory progress in improving the quality of teaching and has eliminated almost all inadequate provision. While the proportion of good and outstanding teaching is increasing, there is still too much teaching that is no better than satisfactory. As teaching is not consistently good and better, it is not raising attainment across the whole academy.

In all the lessons seen, relationships between staff and students were positive. Lesson plans were well structured and usually involved a variety of resources, including the interactive whiteboard. A key feature of the most effective lessons was the use of challenging targets and assessment in order to match activities and questions to the abilities of individuals and groups of students. In these lessons, all students were engaged in a variety of investigative tasks at different levels, sometimes working in pairs or groups, and feeding back their findings regularly to the class. The activities helped to develop students' literacy skills. The teachers' probing questions extended their understanding. Examples include Year 11 students investigating the use of chemicals in industry and Year 7 students exploring book covers to make predictions about texts. Grade or level criteria, together with the teachers' written comments in marking, enabled the students to know how to reach their various targets.

Where teaching was satisfactory, attempts were made to match learning objectives to the students' differing abilities. However, the objectives were not linked specifically to the range of students' targets. Students were given too long to complete tasks, which were often at the same level of challenge. The teachers spent too long asking questions of the whole class that were not targeted to individual abilities. Consequently, the pace of learning was not rapid enough. More able students were insufficiently challenged and less able students insufficiently supported to make good progress. While students with disabilities and those with special educational needs were supported suitably by teaching assistants, their progress was limited by the whole-class approach. Not all students know their targets. The teachers' marking is too inconsistent to enable learners to know specifically what they should do to improve their work.

The curriculum is reviewed constantly to meet the needs of individuals and groups of students. It includes a range of academic and vocational courses in the sixth form as well as for younger students. Its success was demonstrated in 2011 in the broadly average proportion of Year 11 students achieving the equivalent of five or more GCSE A* to C grades, and in the increased proportion of Year 13 students achieving

at level 3 in BTEC examinations. The business and enterprise specialism underpins the curriculum and helps to meet the students' interests and aspirations, particularly through strong links with employers. The 'Flexible Friday' curriculum enables the academy to facilitate visits to, and visitors from, external providers. The academy gained the Excellence in Enterprise Education award, the National Standard for Enterprise Education, in April 2011.

The academy has rightly identified the need to improve students' literacy skills across the curriculum and has begun to train staff in this area. This initiative is too recent to demonstrate any substantial impact on raising students' achievement. Inspectors identified some opportunities to enhance students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, for example in a Year 10 geography lesson where students watched with wonder a video clip of cliff erosion. However, provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is not planned systematically across the curriculum.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

While progress in raising attainment has been slow, suitable systems are now in place to improve the quality of teaching further in order to accelerate students' achievement. Self-evaluation by the Principal and senior leaders is accurate and identifies relevant priorities for improvement planning. In particular, it identifies the need to ensure subject leaders are consistently effective in improving the quality of teaching in their departments. Overall, the academy has made satisfactory progress in implementing its development plan. Its capacity to improve is being strengthened through the development of the monitoring and evaluation skills of subject leaders. This includes monitoring students' performance data, lessons, teachers' planning and students' work for appropriate progression. The Principal and senior leaders have introduced more challenging targets to raise expectations of individual students and a clear system for monitoring their progress towards them. They are also implementing a new marking policy. However, they have not ensured the consistent use of these initiatives by all teachers. In addition, leaders and managers at all levels are not comparing students' levels of progress with national expectations rigorously. It is therefore difficult for them to hold individual teachers to account for the achievement of their students and to target appropriate professional development and support in order to accelerate progress. While the proportion of good and outstanding teaching and learning is increasing, the best practice is not being disseminated quickly enough to accelerate students' achievement overall.

The governing body has increased its capacity to hold the academy to account for its standards of attainment. In challenging the academy to address its weaknesses, as well as to celebrate its strengths, the governing body provides a much stronger steer for improvement. It ensures all statutory requirements are met for the safeguarding of students and staff, including all necessary staff recruitment checks and child protection training.

External support

The impact of external support is satisfactory in enabling the academy to raise students' attainment. The range of support is extensive. For example, support from the local authority in improving the quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form has helped to raise standards at A level and in level 3 of the BTEC courses. The support is now targeted at AS-level courses. The school's improvement partner, as part of the academy improvement programme, has carried out a whole-school review which provides clear direction for improvement planning. The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust is sponsoring a middle leader programme to promote consistency across subjects. In addition, teachers attend subject conferences and visit other academies to observe good practice and this is contributing to an increase in good teaching. The Principal is mentored by the executive principal of an academy federation. The Church of England, as a main sponsor, provides a range of support including a chaplain. The other major sponsor, Marjon, is an initial teacher education provider. It plans to support teachers in English and mathematics in the current term.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Accelerate achievement, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching by:
 - using the challenging targets and assessment to match lessons to the range of students' abilities
 - ensuring the new marking policy is used consistently to inform students how to improve their work.
- Ensure all leaders and managers secure consistently good or outstanding teaching, learning and progress by:
 - comparing students' progress with national expectations rigorously
 - disseminating best practice in teaching and learning.

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

Sue Frater
Her Majesty's Inspector

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