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Ms C Burgess

Principal

The Oldham Academy North

Rochdale Road

Oldham

Greater Manchester

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Dear Ms Burgess

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of The Oldham Academy North

Introduction

Following my visit with Marguerite Murphy, 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, senior leaders, middle leaders, teaching staff, groups of students, the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body and the sponsor's education adviser. Inspectors observed 17 lessons and two tutor sessions.

Context

The Oldham Academy North opened in September 2010 in the same buildings as the predecessor school. It is anticipated that the new academy building will be completed in 2013. The academy's sponsor is E-ACT.

There are currently 745 students, aged 11 to 16 years, on roll. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well-above average, as is the

proportion who speak English as an additional language and the percentage of disabled students and those with special educational needs. Almost all students are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The vast majority of teaching and support staff from the predecessor school joined the academy. However, there have been a number of staff changes since the academy opened. More recently, leadership and teaching appointments have included two experienced assistant principals, a new faculty leader for English and modern foreign languages, and six Teach First teachers. The senior leadership team also includes two 'future leaders'. The Principal was appointed in January 2010 and the vice-principal in April 2010. The academy's primary specialism is visual arts.

Pupils' achievement

Students' attainment when they enter the academy is significantly below average. In 2011, following its first year in operation, all GCSE performance measures were broadly similar to the national average with the exception of the proportion of students that achieved five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics.

Results in English and mathematics presented a mixed picture. The proportion of students attaining at least GCSE grade C in mathematics was similar to the national average, however, results in English were significantly below average. Similarly, while the large majority of students in Year 11 made the expected progress in mathematics, the proportion making the required progress in English was below the national figure. Overall, boys made significantly less progress than girls.

In other subject areas, GCSE results in science overall and history were above the national average. However, with the exception of science, attainment at the highest level, notably the proportion of students attaining A* and A grades, was below average in all subject areas.

The academy sets challenging attainment targets. Current assessment information indicates that Year 11 students are on track to secure further improvements in key GCSE performance measures, including the proportion of students attaining five A* to C grades including English and mathematics. They are also on course to reach expected national progress measures in both English and mathematics. Disabled students and those with special educational needs are making at least expected progress.

Evidence observed in lessons and the academy's assessment data indicate that students in Years 7 to 10 are making expected progress overall. However, academy leaders recognise the need to improve further the quality and accuracy of assessment information in order to analyse with greater rigour the achievement of key groups in all year groups, particularly boys and more-able students.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students enjoy coming to the academy and this is reflected in their improved punctuality record and their attendance which is above the national average figure. The academy has introduced rigorous systems to monitor both aspects and overall students and families have responded well with significant improvements evident.

Students understand fully the academy's expectations for behaviour. Movement around the building and academy site is orderly and students are well supervised. In lessons, students behave well. They understand classroom routines, and relationships between adults and students are good.

The academy provides students with effective pastoral care, notably through the house system, and, as a result, students feel safe and consider that any bullying incidents are dealt with effectively. The introduction of the 'internal exclusion room' has supported further the significant reduction to date in the number of fixed-term exclusions. The academy has now started to focus on further developing and enhancing students' behaviour skills in lessons to support and maximise their learning.

The effectiveness of provision

Inspection evidence broadly supports the academy's view of the quality of teaching. Inspectors observed a sample of lessons in a range of subjects and across all year groups. In the large majority of lessons seen, the quality of teaching was at least good resulting in students making better than expected progress. In these lessons, teachers' expectations were high and activities were well-matched to students' ability levels. Students played an active part in their learning, with many opportunities to discuss and share their ideas with their peers and the teacher, promoting their independent learning and level of engagement and, where needed, their literacy skills.

The effective use of assessment strategies was also a notable feature, including the use of targeted questioning to check students' understanding and challenge their thinking. Regular links were made throughout the lessons to match students' learning with assessment levels and grades, and to their targets.

Where teaching was satisfactory, the pace was slower with more lengthy input from teachers and fewer opportunities for discussion, and work did not always take full account of students' ability or literacy levels. Academy leaders recognise the need to ensure consistency in the quality of teaching for all key groups of students in all subject areas to secure and sustain better achievement.

Students generally know their targets. Regular marking of students' work is evident, with the best practice including links to assessment criteria and levels, and helpful

comments on how to improve further. This is not yet consistent, however, across all year groups and subject areas.

The academy's curriculum offer includes an integrated curriculum for Year 7 students and a restructured Key Stage 4 curriculum, introduced to more closely reflect the needs, interests and aspirations of all its students. This now includes three targeted 'pathways', with a focus on GCSE qualifications. The academy's visual arts specialism and the extensive and varied range of opportunities available in the academy's personal enrichment programme further enhance students' wider curriculum experiences. This is evident in both the recent improvements in students' achievement and the high proportion of students continuing in further education, employment and training after leaving the academy.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The Principal provides clear strategic direction and has laid firm foundations for the current work and future development of the academy. Supported by key senior leaders, she has managed significant change effectively and, as appropriate, introduced, developed and strengthened procedures and systems to accelerate the rate of improvement across the academy.

Senior leaders' roles have been reviewed with each accountable for whole-academy and middle leader development. As a result, senior and middle leaders collectively have a sharp focus on the academy's key priorities. Faculty leaders, in particular, are now further developing their role in monitoring and evaluating achievement and classroom practice through an increasing involvement in quality assurance procedures. However, the academy is aware that the range of experience at this key level currently varies considerably.

The monitoring of teaching across the academy and performance management procedures for all academy personnel have been fully reviewed. Greater rigour is now evident. Consequently, through regular lesson feedback and well-targeted performance objectives, teachers have a clearer understanding of their accountability for the quality of teaching and students' achievement. These changes have also allowed the academy to start to tailor support, coaching and professional development activities more precisely to successfully improve provision and also tackle any unsatisfactory practice.

The academy's improvement plan is appropriately focused on a number of key priorities and supported by faculty action plans. The academy's evaluation of the impact of its actions to date is accurate, with a clear understanding of the further work required, particularly in provision, to embed, yet quicken the rate of improvement.

The governing body has a wide range of experience, including from education and business. The latter is appropriately drawn on by academy leaders. Governors are well informed, particularly through regular reports to the committees from senior leaders. The governing body has provided effective challenge and, since constituted, has taken decisive steps to ensure ongoing academy improvement. The academy's arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements.

The academy has worked hard to develop productive links with the community it serves. The visual arts specialism and curriculum partnerships with primary schools, for example in physical education and modern foreign languages, have helped to promote engagement and understanding of the academy's work. Positive links with the local providers of post-16 education are also evident.

External support

The academy has benefited, as part of the E-ACT academy network, from advice on personnel matters, building issues, finance and professional development. Regular monitoring and support from the sponsor's adviser has ensured that the academy's progress is kept under review, with clear recommendations for action.

The academy has developed good links with a number of partners, including academies in the E-Act group, local primary schools, small businesses and local further education colleges.

Main Judgement

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Maintain the focus on improving achievement and accelerate this work further, particularly in English and for boys and higher ability students across the curriculum.
- Develop further the quality of teaching to ensure that it is consistently good in all lessons by:
 - using assessment strategies more effectively, including questioning and feedback to students
 - promoting independent learning to fully engage and challenge all students.

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

Angela Headon

Her Majesty's Inspector