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Mr John Rigby
Principal
Ormiston Bolingbroke Academy
Barnfield Avenue
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Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 6EP

Dear Mr Rigby

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Ormiston Bolingbroke Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Janet Palmer Her Majesty's Inspector to your academy on 18 and 19 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, other nominated staff, groups of students and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Context

Ormiston Bolingbroke Academy opened in September 2010 and serves the community of Runcorn new town. The predecessor school was Halton High School. The academy's sponsors are the Ormiston Trust and University of Chester. Student numbers have increased from 530 in the predecessor school to currently 765. The

sixth form has 158 students enrolled. Currently and historically, a combination of low aspirations, low levels of engagement and low attainment have disadvantaged the life chances for young people within the academy's local area. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. The proportions of students with special educational needs, those with disabilities and those with a statement of special educational needs are also above the national average. Many staff of the predecessor school transferred to the academy when it opened but expansion within the last year has meant increased numbers of new staff. New senior leaders and heads of mathematics and English have been appointed. Staffing is currently stable and morale is high.

Students' achievement

The standards reached by most students joining the academy in Year 7 are below the national average; low literacy levels present a significant barrier to learning. Examination results at Key Stage 4 in 2011 and current tracking of Year 11 and Year 10 students indicate rapidly improving trends in standards of attainment. The proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades increased by over 25% from the average in the predecessor schools to reach 100% in 2011. The proportion of students attaining this measure with English and mathematics included has rapidly increased to 49%. The most recent modular examination results and scrutiny of current tracking information indicate that the improvement trend will further accelerate in 2012. Gaps in performance between groups of students, such as those known to be eligible for free school meals, are narrowing as a result of focused intervention. Pass rates for first year A-level courses in the sixth form in 2010/11 matched national benchmarks. Academy leaders recognise that results in English and mathematics at Key Stage 4 remain below the national average and require further improvement.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students agreed that behaviour has improved significantly since the inception of the academy. Students feel safe and behave very well in lessons and around the academy. Teachers manage behaviour in a calm and positive manner and consequently relationships between students and staff are excellent. They are characterised by mutual respect and trust. Students reported no concerns over any type of bullying. Students have a good understanding of safety issues relating to their own health and well-being because these aspects are well covered through the curriculum and the pastoral system. Attendance is high because of well-considered intervention and reward systems. Opportunities for students to understand and develop an awareness of the diversity of British culture are limited.

The effectiveness of provision

Leaders have established quickly and effectively a 'critical mass' of good and better teaching that is moving the academy rapidly forward. Teaching is marked by high expectations of student behaviour and engagement. A brisk pace is set and students are attentive to their tasks and have a strong focus on improvement. Concepts are explained clearly and students' understanding of them checked regularly. Learning objectives are clear and the planning of lessons is very thorough. Lessons are characterised by a strong focus on the development of oracy; effective questioning revises learning points, maintains students' attention and encourages them to think deeply and reflectively about their answers. Group and pair work is well planned and enhances collaborative learning skills. There is much excellent use of technology to support teaching and learning. Time is well used. Marking and assessment practice is of high quality.

The academy places a strong emphasis on developing students' basic literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum and most notably in Years 7 and 8. Tracking and monitoring systems indicate that students are making good progress and advancing several levels from often low starting points on entry. This focus is complemented by an equally strong emphasis on developing listening, problem solving, cooperative and oracy skills. The Key Stage 4 curriculum has been remodelled to better suit the needs of all students. Distinctive pathways have been established to provide a more focused approach to vocational and GCSE levels and to link into further progression routes at post-16 level and employment. The alternative curriculum for formerly disengaged learners has been refocused to provide higher quality and more appropriate provision. The sixth form provides a wide range of traditional A levels alongside vocational courses. Apprenticeship courses in construction and hairdressing have been introduced. The academy provides an exceptional enrichment programme in terms of quality, variety and participation.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

A key characteristic of the academy is its drive to establish a culture of continuous improvement and ambition: this ethos permeates all aspects of its work. The Principal provides excellent leadership and a sharp focus on improvement. He is ably supported by a highly effective vice-principal and group of senior leaders. They have established a very strong aspirational focus that has been fully embraced by staff and students. Challenging targets are set for students and teachers. Robust data systems to track and monitor students' progress are embedded. The management of data, evaluation of performance and tracking of progress are strong. The management of teaching and learning is excellent with a culture of ambition and innovation being developed across the curriculum. There is effective management of the sixth form. Professional development programmes are highly focused and have

enabled teachers to improve and develop new skills. Governors are fully involved in the monitoring of the academy's work and are very supportive of its development. Self-evaluation is clear and accurate. Strong partnerships with feeder primary schools ensure students' transition is well planned.

External support

Links with local primary and secondary schools are productive. Good links are established with the local authority across a number of areas. Representatives from the sponsors are regular visitors, involved in governance and play a pivotal role in the academy's progress and development. Staff place a high value on well-focused consultancy which has enhanced improvement and supports the aspirational culture. Highly valued professional development programmes have been established with the University of Chester. The academy has also drawn on the support of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to increase the percentage of students gaining good grades at GCSE in English and mathematics.
- To arrange and promote greater opportunities for students to experience and understand the diversity of British society.

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

Patrick Geraghty
Her Majesty's Inspector