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Ms D Pickering
Landau Forte Academy
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Dear Ms Pickering

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Landau Forte Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Simon Rowe, additional inspector, to your academy on 7–8 February 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 monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, senior leaders, subject and pastoral leaders, groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Chief Executive of the Landau Forte Charitable Trust. Inspectors observed 20 lessons, many with a member of the senior leadership team, four tutor sessions and conducted a learning walk on the sixth form site. Inspectors concentrated their activities on the students who attend the 11–16 part of the academy.

Context

The Landau Forte Academy predecessor school, Woodhouse Business and Enterprise College, was an 11–18 secondary school. The academy has retained its business and enterprise specialism and added science as a specialist area. The academy opened in September 2010 with the support of its sponsor The Landau Forte Charitable Trust. In September 2011, the academy moved to two new

purpose-built sites. Students aged 11–16 years are taught on one site and those aged 16–18 years on another, along with students from other local academies and schools. There are well established plans for the latter to be a separate 16–18 academy from September 2012. At the time of the formation of the academy, the predecessor school did not have a substantive headteacher. A new Principal was appointed, who had been a deputy headteacher in the predecessor school. The majority of staff transferred from the predecessor school and there have been significant changes to leadership roles at all levels. The academy has a house system and students belong to mixed-age tutor groups.

The academy is of above-average size. There are 903 students on roll at the site for 11–16 year olds and 333 at the sixth form centre. The majority of the Year 12 students have not previously attended the academy. Students' attainment on entry is below the national average and the proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is below average, as is the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is broadly average.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Achievement has improved and is now satisfactory for most students and for an increasing proportion it is good. The academy is successfully closing the achievement gap for disabled students, those with special educational needs and students who are known to be eligible for free school meals. In 2011, a group of students who had previously had a poor behaviour record and had been taught at an alternative provision centre were re-integrated into the academy so they could follow a more appropriate curriculum. All were successful in completing their education and gaining a number of GCSE examinations, albeit fewer than their peers. For these students, this represented good achievement.

Progress in English has improved, with the majority of students making good progress in this subject. Consequently, results are improving and are broadly average. In mathematics, progress has improved and is now satisfactory. While results have risen, they remain below average. In both subjects, the proportion of students who gain a grade A or A* at GCSE is below average.

The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C is above average and, when English and mathematics are included, it has risen from 31% in the last year of the predecessor school to 48% in 2011. The academy's accurate assessment records show that this is likely to improve again in 2012. In the sixth form, early indicators show that students are achieving well.

During the inspection, students were observed making mainly good progress in lessons. Progress is best when students are challenged by the work and engaged in their learning. Learning is good because students are empowered and they enjoy working independently or in groups.

In lessons, when progress is satisfactory it is often because teachers do not have high enough expectations. Work is repetitive, students are not encouraged to think for themselves and they complete tasks which lack challenge and interest.

The academy has successfully concentrated on improving students' literacy skills. There is generally good support to improve reading. For students in Years 7 and 8, there is an identified group who receive additional support for their literacy. In tutor time, students often complete exercises aimed at improving their reading and comprehension of language, as well as supporting improvements in numeracy. More students now read for pleasure.

The quality of teaching

The strong drive to improve the quality of teaching has meant that many lessons are good and some outstanding. When teaching is best there is good pace, activities are challenging and excellent relationships exist between staff and students and between students. Teachers' questioning is a strength, especially to check and ensure students' understanding. Teachers then adapt their teaching in response to students' answers. Assessment is used well to identify how well students are achieving and then give support and advice to ensure they can meet their challenging targets. There is sometimes a very good learning dialogue developed as students respond to the teacher's comments. However, this is not a consistent feature of assessment and marking.

When teaching is satisfactory, lessons lack challenge and students are not engaged in their learning. Teaching does not motivate and teachers dominate the lesson. Students do not get opportunities to work independently or spend too long inactive, listening to their teacher before they get down to work. Often lessons are targeted at the middle attainers and do not meet the needs of all students. At times, students are not given sufficient support with their reading to enable them to access the work. Marking is variable, both in quality and quantity, and does not give enough support for students to improve.

Lessons often give students opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. In English, students were observed developing spiritual awareness when considering empathy with a character in the book they were studying. In another lesson, students considered the moral implications about being asked different questions at an interview. In geography, students examined the cultural implications of high birth rates in certain countries which have high infant mortality. Students' social development is supported through the mixed-age tutor groups and the many opportunities they have to work collaboratively, for example within art.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Around the academy, behaviour is generally good and students are polite and considerate. They are proud of their new buildings although, at times, a small minority do not take enough care about the environment and litter is an issue, especially after breaks.

Behaviour in lessons is variable. In the best lessons, students are highly engaged, enthusiastic and work very well. However, the same students who were observed behaving well in some lessons were then observed in others when they lacked engagement and enthusiasm, and were then sometimes off task. This was because the teaching failed to engage, challenge and motivate students who became restless while listening to the teacher for a long time.

Students say they feel safe in the academy, bullying incidents are rare and the academy has ensured they have a good understanding of cyber-bullying issues. The academy supports both victim and perpetrator well when an incident does occur, including a follow up to ensure all is still well. The numbers of exclusions, incidents of poor behaviour and absence have decreased significantly. The very effective pastoral and inclusion team meet regularly to review attendance, persistent absence and behaviour issues and ensure that any concerns are addressed, with agreed interventions which are closely monitored. In general, students know how to keep themselves safe but their understanding of issues relating to sexual health and the dangers of substance abuse are less well developed. Support for disabled students and those with special educational needs is very well organised and effective.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Senior leaders provide excellent drive and ambition to challenge any underperformance. There is a very accurate self-evaluation of the academy's work. The improvement plan identifies clear areas for improvement and is challenging with its success criteria. Joint observations with senior leaders showed they were very secure with their judgments on the quality of teaching and were able to astutely identify areas for development for individual teachers. The drive to ensure all teaching is consistently at least good has ensured much more teaching is judged good or better but there remains a residue of weaker teaching. The work of middle leaders is improving, with subject and curriculum area leaders now better able to support the drive to improve standards and the quality of learning.

Governance is strong and effective. The strong support of the governing body and the corporate overview of the Landau Forte Charitable Trust have ensured very good support and challenge to the academy. The academy has demonstrated, through sustained improvement, that it has a good capacity to improve. The academy meets the government requirements for safeguarding students.

The curriculum meets the needs of the students well. There is a wide variety of courses available in Key Stage 4 and students are increasingly taking options which

will lead to the English Baccalaureate. Greater opportunities to study a modern foreign language have been introduced in Key Stage 3, leading to more students opting for this in Key Stage 4. There are opportunities for students to take GCSE examinations early when appropriate but this is not the norm and the majority of courses lead to GCSE accreditation at the end of Year 11. Some students extend their mathematics after completing their GCSE by studying for a free-standing mathematics qualification (FSMQ). Others follow appropriate vocational courses, for example hair and beauty, construction and motor vehicle maintenance with a local provider. The curriculum is enriched through a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, which many students enjoy. The academy and governing body monitor the take-up of extra-curricular activities as well as the achievement from different groups to ensure equality of opportunity.

The academy utilises its specialist area of business and enterprise through enterprise days and by linking enterprise with subjects, for example the performing arts. The new specialism of science has been used to increase the options available for students, with more taking the three separate sciences. Students start their GCSE science courses in Year 9.

External support

Staff and expertise from the Landau Forte Academy in Derby have been the main source of additional support. Additional support has been provided for subjects, for example science. Expertise in improving teaching and learning has been shared to ensure senior staff have a good understanding of what constitutes good practice. While the initial support tended to be from the Derby academy, there are now instances where good practice is shared both ways, for example the good practice for disabled students and those with special educational needs.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of the weakest teaching and learning so that variation is reduced and the vast majority lessons are judged at least good by:
 - ensuring all lessons engage, motivate and challenge students to learn well
 - giving students greater opportunities to work independently or in groups
 - ensuring students who have difficulty reading are supported so they understand what they need to do
 - ensuring assessment, including marking, is used consistently to inform students how well they are achieving, what they can do to improve and then gives them opportunities to respond to the advice so that their work consistently demonstrates good progress.

- Increase opportunities for students to learn about sexual health and the dangers of substance abuse as part of their personal tutor programme.

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

Michael Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector