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Mrs M Boyle
Principal
Knole Academy
Knole West
Sevenoaks
TN13 3LE

Dear Mrs Boyle

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Knole Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Christine Raeside HMI to your academy on 1 and 2 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 first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, visited 24 lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, members of the leadership team, groups of students and members of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body who is also the main sponsor.

Context

The academy was formed in 2010 by the amalgamation of Wildernesse Boys' School and Bradbourne Girls' School, using both original sites. In September 2011 the two schools came together on the former Bradbourne site. The other site is still used for some lessons in science and physical education. The sponsors are Gordon Phillips, Sevenoaks School and Kent County Council and the academy's specialism is expressive arts. The International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme has been introduced at Key Stage 3. Some lessons are taught in temporary accommodation in

the 'pod'. Development work to provide state-of-the-art facilities in music, dance, drama, science, business studies, visual arts and sport is at the planning stage.

The academy is slightly larger than average with 1178 students, including 138 in the sixth form. There are almost three times as many girls as boys. The proportion of students who are known to be entitled to free school meals is below average at 9%. Most students are White British but around one in seven comes from minority ethnic groups. Very few students speak English as an additional language. Around one in four students has been identified as having special educational needs, predominantly behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, but the proportion of students who have a statement of special educational needs is significantly below the national average. The academy has a very stable student population. There has been some staff turnover but the academy has been successful in filling almost all vacancies with permanent staff.

Pupils' achievement

Students join the academy with low attainment overall, particularly in literacy. Progress in most lessons is at least satisfactory and often good. There is a range of strategies to accelerate students' progress and evidence from the 2011 GCSE results and the academy's own assessment data show an improving trend. The academy inherited a situation where boys were underperforming and there was a significant gap in outcomes between boys and girls. A good range of strategies has been used to accelerate boys' progress and consequently the gap is closing rapidly. Students who have particular additional needs or who are at risk of falling behind are quickly identified and they are given extra help and support. It is still too early, however, for detailed analysis to have been completed to identify the precise impact of these actions. New systems and procedures have been implemented to ensure that the academy has an accurate baseline with reliable assessment data from which students' future progress can be measured.

Other relevant student outcomes

Exclusions are reducing and attendance is improving due to the actions the academy is taking to challenge and support students. Behaviour in lessons and around the academy is generally good and students are polite and welcoming. Students say that they feel cared for and that they have a say in decisions that affect their learning and development. Students helped design 'Knole Watch' which is a student-led initiative to identify and report on issues including bullying and litter.

The effectiveness of provision

In just over half the lessons seen teaching was good or better. In these lessons students were provided with well-structured tasks that were tailored to students'

needs and prior attainment. Good relationships underpinned the learning and students showed a high level of engagement. Students were supported and enabled so that they could evaluate their own progress and the progress of others towards the learning objective of the lesson. The weaker lessons lacked pace and there was too much intervention by the teacher, consequently students did not develop sufficient independence in their learning. In a very few lessons teachers did not have effective strategies to deal with immature behaviour and students' passivity.

The curriculum is responsive to students' needs and has a strong focus on improving literacy, particularly developing reading skills. The academy's expressive arts specialism is used effectively to promote creativity and improve students' self-esteem. Students speak enthusiastically about the annual creativity festival and the opportunities they have to participate in some way or other in performances and to engage with professional artists. A range of other enrichment opportunities including visits, clubs and residential activities provide students with memorable experiences.

Students speak highly of the pastoral care they receive and value the support of their tutors and other staff. They particularly enjoy the opportunities provided in citizenship lessons to explore issues that are relevant to becoming responsible adults. Older students say that they receive good advice to support their choice of courses when joining the sixth form and when choosing to go on to university, training or employment.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders have an ambitious vision for the academy and have been successful in building a staff team who share that vision. The transition from two quite separate schools on different sites to one cohesive academy has been managed well. Rigorous monitoring and accurate self-evaluation inform planning and are driving improvement. Senior leaders demonstrate a clear commitment to improving the quality of teaching and learning. A mixture of challenge, coaching and support has successfully improved the profile of teaching. The governing body has identified appropriate priorities for development and provides the academy with a good balance of challenge and support. The academy's sensible and proportionate safeguarding arrangements ensure that students are kept safe. Successes in raising boys' attainment and an improving trend in outcomes for students demonstrate that the academy has good capacity for further improvement.

External support

The academy has developed productive links with other academies and organisations. These links have been used to support subject reviews and successfully contribute to developing the practice of staff who are seeking improvement. External consultants have supported the academy's self-review

effectively. A partnership with the co-sponsor school is contributing well to provision for gifted and talented students.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

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

Robert Ellis
Her Majesty's Inspector