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Mrs W Tomes
Principal
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Dear Mrs Tomes

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Sidney Stringer Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with James McNeillie, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 7 and 8 March 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, nominated staff, groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors who represented the sponsors. Inspectors observed 28 lessons all delivered by different staff. They held meetings with senior leaders, scrutinised the students' work and enjoyed a range of informal discussions with students of all ages.

Context

Sidney Stringer Academy opened in September 2010 and is sponsored by City College Coventry, Coventry City Council, Coventry University and Jaguar Land Rover. The academy moved into phase one of the new building in July 2011 and the last phase is due to finish in April 2012.

There have been four new appointments to the senior team since the academy opened and the roles of the leadership team have changed as part of a whole-staff restructuring.

Almost all of the staff of the predecessor school transferred to the academy and new subject leaders were appointed for science, English, the expressive arts, business and computing, and world languages. The academy employs staff from the Teach First and Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP). Staff turnover remains low.

The academy is larger than the average secondary school, with a growing sixth form. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is more than double the national average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is four times the national figure and the percentage of students who speak English as an additional language is six times the national average. Just over 10% of the students are White British and the largest other groups are from an Indian sub-continent background. An increasing number of East European students are joining the academy. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is double the national average.

Achievement of students at the academy

Attainment on entry is well below average and approximately 20% of the students have not had a British primary education. In 2011, attainment, as measured by the average points scored in public examinations, was significantly above the national average. The proportion of students securing five higher grade GCSE including English and mathematics was close to the national figure and the early results of the 2012 GCSE examinations, confirmed by the examination board, show further improvement.

The 2011 educational value added score related to the students' performance in their best eight public examinations, at 1,053, is amongst the highest in England. Variations in student progress remain, as English and mathematics are more successful than, for example, science. Groups of students, including disabled students and those with special educational needs, are also making better progress than similar groups of students nationally. The academy's impact on narrowing gaps in the performance of disadvantaged students and raising attainment in English and mathematics, Key Stage 2 to 4 is significantly above average. The students' current good learning and performance in the classroom mirrors the very positive review of teaching noted in this report.

Sixth-form provision is good. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average and students make good progress overall. Year 13 outcomes at A level are above the national average, although results in Year 12 are mixed, with strong performances in

vocational and applied GCSE courses and more variable outcomes at AS level. Students made good progress in all sixth-form lessons seen during this inspection.

The quality of teaching

Inspectors conducted joint observations with senior managers; the views expressed by senior staff matched the judgements given by inspectors. Teaching was found to be good or better in more than 80% of lessons, including nearly 40% judged to be outstanding.

In the best lessons, tasks are well planned, questioning is skilful, and learning is driven forward at a brisk pace by precise instruction. Class teachers and learning support assistants form a skilful team that maintain a challenging dialogue within the classroom. The use of assessment and the quality of marking evident in the students' books are notable features of these strong lessons. The students' excellent attitudes to learning mean that they settle quickly to work, remain focused throughout, engage in debate and challenge, learn very well from each other and often make quick progress.

Lessons are planned well to take into account different levels of abilities and needs. Good quality scaffolding and support are provided where necessary, along with opportunities for tasks, activities and groupings to stretch the most able students. Staff have very good subject knowledge, they choose resources well and questioning presents learning as an enquiry that supports student independence. Students are expected to justify responses and use subject-specific vocabulary accurately. For example, in two outstanding Year 11 science lessons, staff robustly pursued the use of technical vocabulary and secured high grade GCSE style responses.

Inspectors scrutinised a range of students' books and consistently noted effective marking with some exceptional practice seen in English, where the teachers' diagnostic skills and high quality formative comment had secured clear improvement in the students' work. When lessons were judged to be outstanding, for example in history, the students' application of prior knowledge and understanding, and the challenge provided, generated small group spiritual, social, moral and cultural debate from mainly Muslim students who were studying the growth of the Mormon religious sect. Similarly, in business studies, the teacher's structured approach to the lesson allowed students to learn very well from each other and assess their own progress.

Where lessons failed to meet the inspection criteria for good teaching, too much was planned for a session and learning was not consolidated. In some sessions, students were asked to self- or peer-evaluate their work without being given the appropriate criteria to guide their efforts effectively. In these lessons, opportunities were missed to make connections between subjects or for the explicit reinforcement of literacy skills.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The students' behaviour was particularly impressive. Students were keen to express their pride in the academy and they were the dominant feature in the positive learning environment noted by inspectors. The students make every effort to ensure that others learn and thrive in an atmosphere of respect and dignity. Students show high levels of engagement, courtesy, collaboration and cooperation in and out of lessons.

Attendance has risen and is above the national average. Students' arrival is punctual in the morning, and movement around the academy is brisk. The numbers of students excluded has declined notably in the last year and persistent absence is below the national figure. Students were positive about all aspects of the academy; they felt safe and noted that bullying was not a concern.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The leadership team has a collegiate strength that is helping the academy move rapidly forward. Standards are rising and educational achievement is particularly impressive. The level of sophistication and personalisation within the academy's curriculum has secured improved standards and student motivation through a planned programme of accelerated progression from entry through to A level and beyond. Senior leaders are aware of the steps that need to be taken to meet the criteria for an outstanding grade against the current inspection criteria.

There has been an effective focus on equality of opportunity and the inclusion/intervention programme is clearly having a positive impact on standards and achievement. Self-evaluation is accurate but needs to be able to respond quickly to potential changes in Ofsted inspection requirements and the Department for Education policy. Governance is effective and the working arrangements with the academy's sponsors are enhancing local educational opportunities. The academy's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements.

External support

Good use has been made of consultants available through the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and from major education contractors. Work with two of the academy's sponsors is currently underway; Edge Hill University is providing a Masters Degree programme to over 25 staff and Jaguar Land Rover's teacher placement and engineering education schemes for post-16 students are in place. Discussions are underway with Coventry College to enhance curriculum links pre- and post-16.

Main Judgements

The academy has made outstanding, progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Refine the academy's use of data on student progress from point of entry to GCSE and A level to clearly display progress over time given their starting points.

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

David Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc Chair of the Governing Body
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