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Ms McCartney
Principal
Ormiston Venture Academy
Oriol Avenue
Gorleston
NR31 7JJ

Dear Ms McCartney

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Ormiston Venture Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Martin Cragg, Her Majesty's Inspector to your academy on 25–26 April 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 and middle leaders, two groups of students and two representatives of the Governing Board.

Context

Ormiston Venture Academy opened in September 2010 in the existing buildings of the predecessor school. New buildings are planned for completion in 2013. It is sponsored by Ormiston Academies Trust. It has partnerships with Gresham's School, the local authority and some local primary schools. Most staff transferred from the predecessor school. Since then, a few have left or joined the academy and currently the academy has a full complement of qualified teachers. A new Principal and some senior and middle leaders have been appointed. The large majority of the 638 pupils are White British. The percentage known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. Student mobility is low. There is a higher than average

proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, and these are mostly moderate learning or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The academy specialises in mathematics and digital media.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Standards have risen sharply since opening. In 2011 the vast majority of Year 11 students attained at least five A* to C grades. Based on their well below average starting points and the low standards achieved in the predecessor school, this is a notable achievement. This year, students are predicted to achieve higher standards. The proportion of students attaining at least five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, increased to 46% in 2011, more than double the amount achieved by the predecessor school. This year, 52% of pupils have already achieved this benchmark which is above the academy's target. Senior leaders anticipate this will rise further to close to the national average after GCSE examinations later this year.

Extensive monitoring of students' progress and decisive action to personalise provision for them is ensuring that the variations between groups of students and subjects are closing quickly. Girls attained higher than boys in 2011 but strategies to engage boys in their learning have narrowed this gap considerably this year. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals attaining at least five A* to C grades including English and mathematics more than doubled in 2011. The academy's commitment to fully including disabled students and those who have special educational needs in all aspects of provision has led to the vast majority attaining five or more A* to C grades. Results in GCSE English have risen faster than in mathematics. A renewed focus on promoting numeracy across the curriculum and showing students how to apply mathematics in everyday situations is helping to close this gap.

Changes introduced by senior leaders have generated a strong ethos based on regular attendance, hard effort and high achievement. Senior leaders have raised students' expectations and engendered a corporate willingness of staff to provide every student with the skills and qualifications for the next stage of their education, training or the work-place. A combination of improved teaching and behaviour, extensive monitoring and targeted interventions to support students at risk of underachieving has led to a rapid rise in standards. Adjustments to the curriculum are helping to reverse the legacy of low standards in science. This year, most students are expected to attain the equivalent of two A* to C grades.

The quality of teaching

Students value the quality of teaching they receive and feel that it is much better than in the predecessor school. They told inspectors that they are on-track to achieve what they are capable of because of the high expectations teachers have of them and the help and encouragement they provide. Lessons observed jointly by senior leaders and inspectors confirmed this. Classrooms were orderly, calm and purposeful. Lesson planning was thorough with clear objectives. Teachers used a

range of techniques to capture students' interest, encourage them to contribute their ideas and learn together in small groups. Students were encouraged to take an active part in practical learning tasks. Clear introductions, good pace and probing questioning helped to accelerate their learning. Teachers showed good subject knowledge. They developed good working relations with students, but not all of them planned regular opportunities for them to learn independently for extended periods of time.

Thorough assessment enabled teachers to know their students well. They used this information to plan learning outcomes matched to their different abilities but activities in lessons were often the same so all students ended up doing similar tasks. For some gifted and talented students, tasks were too easy and did not challenge them fully. Some outstanding teaching was observed. In these lessons, challenging questions were directed towards more-able students expected to attain a grade A, and other questions were pitched at a lower level for those aiming to attain a grade C. In a boys' physical education lesson, students were encouraged to lead their own learning by finding out for themselves which techniques for exchanging the relay baton were the most effective and applying them in small, competitive races.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Clear, coherent procedures to manage behaviour are firmly established. This has contributed directly to the academy's rapid improvement because students feel safe and free from all types of bullying, and teachers are not distracted by minor disruption in lessons. Student exclusions have reduced considerably this year. Students are punctual, sensible and polite. They wear their uniform with pride and adopt responsibility as prefects, councillors, team and inner college leaders. They enthused about the range of enrichment opportunities provided for them. Closer monitoring of attendance has reduced persistent absence significantly. Overall attendance is above the national average. Procedures to safeguard the welfare of students are secure.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Inspirational, highly effective leadership from the Principal has driven a wide range of improvements in a short period of time. Her vision and determination to raise achievement have led to much higher standards compared with the predecessor school. Ably supported by senior and middle leaders, she has reignited students' belief that they are capable of achieving success. She has won the confidence and respect of students and gained the full commitment of staff to deliver the academy's aims. She has ensured that the academy has new relations with the local community including parents and carers, and local primary schools.

A shortened Key Stage 3 curriculum and innovative pathways in Key Stage 4 are making a significant contribution to raising standards. Flexible arrangements for the early-entry and re-sitting of examinations enable students to attain what they are

capable of in a range of subjects. The academy's specialism of digital media is used as a key tool for raising standards. Current assessment data and the results already achieved in a range of subjects indicate that the academy is exceeding its targets.

Senior leaders know the academy's strengths and weaknesses well. Improvement planning is firmly based on thorough self-evaluation and regular audits of provision. Excellent monitoring procedures hold all middle managers to account for the standards achieved in their subjects. Decisive action has been taken to eradicate inadequate teaching, reduce the need for temporary staff and increase the proportion of good or better teaching. Regular lesson monitoring provides senior leaders with a clear view of the quality of teaching and the impact of their interventions to strengthen it. Staff training and routine monitoring have empowered middle leaders to work collaboratively and share good practice to promote improvement. Leaders and managers at all levels are demonstrating an exceptional capacity to secure further improvement.

External support

The Governing Board works closely with the Ormiston Academies Trust to provide a clear, strategic direction for the academy and manage the proposed building project. It provides senior leaders with an excellent range of assessment and monitoring tools to aid improvement. Regular visits by education advisers from the Trust and periodic, external reviews of subjects have helped senior leaders to raise achievement in a short space of time. Initial support from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and links with a local independent school are valued highly by the Principal.

Main Judgements

The academy has made outstanding progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Move satisfactory teaching to consistently good or outstanding by checking that activities in all lessons are matched to the abilities of students, especially the most able, and by providing more opportunities for them to learn independently for sustained periods of time.

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

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector