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Mr Michael Gosling
Principal
Trinity Academy, Halifax
Holdsworth Road
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West Yorkshire
HX2 9TD

Dear Mr Gosling

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Trinity Academy, Halifax

Introduction

Following my visit with Sara Morrissey, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 24 and 25 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 held meetings with the Principal; senior leaders with responsibility for particular aspects of the academy's work; leaders for mathematics and English; the Director of Human Resources; groups of students; and with the Chair of the Governing Body, representing the sponsors.

Context

There are 1117 students on roll, of whom 210 are in the sixth form (Phase 3). The proportions of students from minority ethnic groups and of those who speak English as an additional language are low. The proportion of students known to be entitled to free academy meals is below average. The proportion of students included in the academy's register of special educational needs is above average and represents

around one quarter to one third of students in total. Of these, the proportion of students who have a statement of special education need or are supported with additional, specific provision by the academy is above average and represents just over one in ten students. The level of mobility of students is higher than usually found.

Many staff transferred from the predecessor school. However, since the opening of the academy a number of teaching staff have left and there have been several staffing changes to senior posts and to middle management positions, such as heads of subjects. Initially, there was significant turnover of staff in the mathematics faculty; this is now stable.

In February 2012, the Principal of the academy was appointed as executive headteacher of both the academy and the adjacent St Catherine's Catholic High school. This school is due to close in summer 2013 and was judged to require special measures at its recent inspection in March 2012. The academy's new premises are being further extended to meet the increase in the number of students on roll that will arise as a consequence of this closure. Changes have been made to senior leadership responsibilities across the two schools to accommodate this change. The senior vice-principal of the academy is currently responsible for the day-to-day running of the academy. The academy is scheduled to move into new buildings, which have been constructed nearby, in September 2012.

The academy has two specialisms: in business and enterprise; and in health and social care.

Achievement of students at the academy

The academy's impact thus far on raising students' attainment is outstanding. The academy's sponsors and leaders have made this their priority and have taken decisive and sustained action to ensure that a significant difference is being made. The academy is rapidly improving the standard of education it offers, adding good value to the learning and progress of each student.

The achievement of students is improving quickly. Published data for 2011, the end of the first year of the academy's operation, show that the attainment of students had risen: a greater proportion of students obtained several GCSEs, including mathematics and English, at good grades than had been the case at the predecessor school. This figure rose by 13 percentage points. Students' attainment overall at GCSE was higher in 2011 than in 2010, and is above the national average. Attainment in mathematics is noticeably better than before and is a strength.

The academy's assessment data tracking students' current progress indicate that the trend for attainment continues upward. Attainment in mathematics is likely to have risen by over 25 percentage points over the two-year period ending in summer 2012, with over four-fifths of students predicted to gain a high grade in this subject.

Examination results gained thus far back up this assertion. Attainment in English at GCSE is not as strong, but remains around national average. The academy's data show that attainment in this subject, too, is beginning to rise, following changes made to how English is led and taught.

The academy has very recently begun to implement a programme for the development of literacy. It is too early to demonstrate fully the impact this is having but it is clear that students are being encouraged to read from the outset and are being given good opportunities in lessons to practise reading aloud and to develop their speaking and listening skills. There is scope to promote literacy further through other subjects, for example, through the use of important, subject-specific vocabulary and the encouragement of more sophisticated language use. The academy has established a reliable system for checking students' progress in reading, writing and speaking in Years 7 and 8. This identifies early those students who require additional help to remove barriers to learning and a suitable programme of additional support is in place. A 'nurture group' for some students in Years 7 and 8 is proving beneficial in helping them to acquire good skills and attitudes for learning.

The attainment of students is well above the national minimum standards set for secondary schools by the government. However, in 2011 very few students obtained qualifications in the range of subjects for the English Baccalaureate. The academy has made changes to the curriculum to allow a greater proportion of students to obtain this range in future.

Students' current learning and progress are improving well. In lessons observed during the inspection students were usually making good progress. This rapidly-improving picture is reflected in the academy's assessment data. Students put this improvement down to a much better atmosphere for learning in the classrooms and say that they feel they are now being taught well.

The academy is making good progress in narrowing the gaps in the attainment between different groups of students. For example, teachers are now focusing more closely on the achievement of more-able students. The academy's recent data show that, as a result, a greater proportion of these students are beginning to gain top GCSE grades A and A* than before. Leaders and governors recognise that this remains an area for continued development.

The academy has set up good arrangements to promote the achievement of those students who have special educational needs and those with disabilities, and those students whom the academy considers to be the most vulnerable. The academy's data show that the progress of those students is also improving quickly, and that gaps are narrowing. However, further time is needed to demonstrate the full impact of measures put in place to support them. As the academy is poised to expand still further, leaders and governors are aware that their plans will need to include continued, careful consideration of the provision and its impact for these groups of students.

Published data for 2011 show that attainment in the sixth form (Phase 3) is below the national average. The academy's governors and leaders are aware that attainment in Phase 3 needs to improve. Appropriate measures, such as closer tracking of students' progress and a more appropriate and flexible curriculum to meet their needs, have been put into place to help address this. Early signs are that actions taken are having a positive impact: the number of students staying on into Phase 3 is increasing and, as students are increasingly being encouraged and enabled to raise their aspirations, the levels of qualifications they obtain are starting to rise.

The quality of teaching

The leadership and management of teaching and learning are proving very effective in bringing about whole-academy improvement. Leaders have focused sharply on developing teaching strategies that increase students' engagement and raise their aspirations about what they can achieve. The Christian values that underpin the academy's behaviour management strategy promote a positive and supportive climate for learning. Consequently, the quality of teaching and its impact on learning are improving and gaps in students' attainment are narrowing.

Academy leaders have taken decisive action to include staff at all levels in the programme to improve the quality of teaching. Leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching through 'learning walks' and observations. These inform whole-academy initiatives to improve practice and to tackle underperformance.

The contribution of teaching to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is evident through the increased opportunities for working in groups and for cooperative learning. Students interviewed reported that they particularly enjoyed lessons where tasks were practical and allowed them to be creative.

Where teaching is good, a broad variety of briskly-paced activities captures students' interest and engages them actively in their learning. Good levels of challenge are provided through well-chosen resources that are used effectively as a stimulus for discussion or paired activity to solve problems. Teachers use questioning skilfully to test and probe students' understanding of new concepts. In a mathematics lesson where the teaching was outstanding, the teacher's excellent subject knowledge and enthusiastic delivery of relevant and interesting tasks brought learning to life. Consequently, Year 11 students deepened and extended their understanding of standard deviation in preparation for their forthcoming examinations.

Teacher's planning for lessons routinely includes regular checks on progress towards learning objectives. In the best lessons, teachers adapt their plans with confidence to tailor activities to students' needs. However, occasionally, the pace of progress slows because teachers do not adapt tasks to provide sufficient challenge, particularly for higher-attaining students. Opportunities are also missed, at times, to

develop students' use of subject-specific terminology to describe and explain new concepts.

Sixth form lessons observed during the inspection placed good emphasis on developing students' self-belief about what they might achieve. Activities focused well on developing students' skills of enquiry, and on increasing their independence.

Behaviour and safety of students

Expectations of behaviour have been raised since the academy opened and reflect well the academy's Christian ethos. A simple, but easy-to-follow strategy to manage behaviour has been adopted by staff across the academy to good effect. Students have responded very positively to the agreed procedures and value the system of rewards that acknowledge their achievement and attendance. These improvements are also reflected in a significant reduction in the number of fixed-term exclusions for poor behaviour.

During the inspection, lessons were generally characterised by good behaviour; students were considerate towards each other in the crowded restaurant during break times and their behaviour around academy was orderly. Students' attitudes to learning are positive, particularly where teaching challenges them to take greater responsibility for their learning through practical and group activities. However, there are occasional instances where students remain passive either because tasks do not engage them fully or where they are content to allow other students to take a lead in the learning activity.

Students' attendance has risen and is broadly in line with the national average. Leaders have tackled persistent absence rigorously and improvements in the attendance of targeted groups of students have been significant. Detailed analysis of attendance figures for different groups of students enables leaders to target support where it is needed swiftly, so that barriers to attendance and learning may be removed. Inspectors observed no problems with punctuality to school or to lessons during their visit.

Students report that they feel safe around the academy and in lessons. Responses to surveys undertaken by the academy indicate that students, parents and carers are positive about the steps leaders take to prevent bullying and to resolve any issues should they arise. This reflects the robust systems in place to support students whose circumstances make them vulnerable, and reflects the academy's commitment to keeping children safe and free from harm.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The academy's capacity to address weaknesses is growing rapidly, with strong and effective leadership at all levels. The academy's leaders demonstrate convincingly that they are not reliant on external support to effect improvement.

Self-evaluation is rigorous. Leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. They have identified and implemented suitable priorities and actions that are leading to improvement. Leaders are successfully removing barriers to learning, encouraging individual students' self-belief and achievement. This is beginning to close gaps in achievement between groups of students. The confidence of the local community in the academy continues to grow.

Governors, leaders, staff and students share a clearly articulated vision. Leaders have driven forward a shift in culture so that high expectations from staff and for students are the norm. Challenging targets are set. A robust system of performance management stresses the accountability of each member of staff and any underperformance is decisively addressed.

Leaders use assessment data from their monitoring of students' progress intelligently to set challenging targets. Use of robust data is increasingly effective across many key aspects of the academy's work. The curriculum is suitably balanced and is continuing to develop to respond to students' needs. In this, the introduction of 'vertical' tutor groups and 'vertical' teaching across Years 9 to 11 in optional GCSEs is adding to the challenge and enjoyment, helping to raise attainment and promoting good relationships amongst students across the age range.

The academy's governors and sponsors support and challenge the school well to ensure that students' attainment rises. Good links and working relationships have been built up with the academy's leaders to ensure a good flow of relevant information to underpin decision-making. Governors and leaders are aware of the challenges that lie ahead in moving to new buildings and in responding to the planned increase in the academy's roll as they seek to sustain the momentum of improvement seen thus far. Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements.

External support

The impact of external support is good. Through the governing body and trustees, the sponsors provide effective vision and direction for the academy in terms of its Christian ethos and values. Sponsors bring specific support that is enhancing the breadth and depth of the curriculum opportunities and is helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning, for example, through shared teaching and input from the university. Expertise and support from the local authority is facilitating the move to new premises, and links with the college and university are helping to raise students' aspirations, offering relevant pathways forward in education or training, including those related to the academy's specialisms. Business sponsors, working together with academy staff, are forging and sustaining good links with the local community, parents and carers.

This synergy between governors and sponsors, and the academy's leaders, is proving to be highly effective in driving the pace of improvement. Judicious use has been made of external consultancy as part of the academy's planned programme of professional development of staff and of leadership skills.

Main Judgements

The academy has made outstanding progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Implement fully the academy's agreed programme for the promotion of literacy so that all subjects can make a greater contribution to improving students' literacy skills.
- Monitor the impact over time of the provision and actions the academy has taken to narrow the gaps in achievement between groups of students, such as more-able students, and Phase 3 students.

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

Honoree Gordon
Her Majesty's Inspector