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27 April 2012

Mr Martin Brown
The Principal
Cleethorpes Academy
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Lincolnshire
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Dear Mr Brown

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Cleethorpes Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Jan Bennett Her Majesty's Inspector to your academy on 25 to 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, including 22 lesson observations of which 13 were joint observations with members of the senior leadership team. They also observed a tutor group and an assembly, scrutinised documents and met with staff, groups of students and representatives of the governing body and sponsors.

Context

Cleethorpes academy opened in September 2010 in the accommodation of its predecessor school. The academy is sponsored by a trust that brings together a high-performing neighbouring school and its partner university. There is currently an extensive programme of refurbishment of accommodation and facilities underway. Prior to its inception a new Principal, Chief Executive and governing body had been appointed. About one half of the academy's teaching staff transferred to it from the predecessor school. A large number of curriculum leaders were appointed in

September 2011 and the senior team has been restructured. The academy is now fully staffed with specialist teachers. The academy's specialist subjects are English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) with the aim of developing the key skills required for further education or the workplace.

There are 794 students on roll and most students are of White British heritage; a very small minority speak English as an additional language. There are few other ethnic groups represented in the school population and the proportion of Bangladeshi students is higher than found nationally. The proportion of students known to be eligible to free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of students identified as having disabilities and special educational needs is around twice the national average. The academy's admissions arrangements determine that students of all abilities are admitted. There has been a surge of mid-year admissions to all year groups since the academy opened and the 2010 and 2011 intakes are near capacity.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

On entry to the academy, student attainment is well-below average. While the academy saw a modest increase in student attainment in its first year, overall progress levels remained static at well below average. However, the proportion of students making expected progress in English and mathematics remained at broadly average levels. In 2011, 53% of students attained at least five A* to C grade GCSEs including English and mathematics, which is three percentage points higher than the results achieved by the predecessor school. The proportion of students who gained five A* to C grade GCSEs, at 81%, was above average. This figure was the same as in the previous year, and is due largely to success in vocational subjects. The academy exceeded its challenging Key Stage 4 targets in all key measures. Despite some modest increases, attainment remains below national figures in most measures. However, the academy exceeds the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

Improved rates of progress are evident in the tracking data for 2012 and 2013. Observations during the inspection and the academy's own records confirm the view that the progress that students make in lessons has much improved. These rates of improvement are strong enough to bring the academy into line with the national averages in 2012 and beyond in 2013, as students are on course to reach these standards.

The improvements to date are due to a number of significant factors. Detailed tracking systems are in place which give regular information regarding students' progress, providing the trigger for additional support when needed. These interventions enable those who are behind with their work to catch up in good time. There are now high expectations about what the students can achieve and these are linked to aspirational targets which are set in all subjects. Furthermore, improved teaching has promoted good progress in the majority of lessons. In most lessons seen, there is a good pace to the learning and lessons are well-planned and ensure

that most students succeed. Students with disabilities or who have special educational needs generally make good progress due to the timely intervention and support that they receive following the early identification of their specific needs. Senior leaders recognise that pockets of underachievement persist, particularly for students of mid and high abilities and those known to be eligible to free school meals. This is reflected in the relatively low proportion of higher grade GCSEs achieved. However, these gaps in attainment are narrowing.

Monitoring of reading ages throughout the academy became established in 2011 in association with a reading improvement strategy. This strategy is delivered as a mixture of small-sized formal key skills classes at Key Stage 3 together with supported reading using Year 11 'buddies'. The academy's data show that most students are making improved progress in terms of reading and spelling ages.

The quality of teaching

There is strong evidence that teaching has improved since the academy opened. Recruitment difficulties faced in its early days have now been resolved. Arrangements between the partner schools enable a free-flow of teachers across the partnership and a programme where the chief executive officer recruits in Canada has brought new teachers into shortage subjects. Senior leaders have eliminated virtually all inadequate teaching, mainly through targeted training and coaching programmes. Similar support programmes have improved much of the satisfactory teaching to become good but disproportionately less teaching is outstanding.

In the best lessons seen, a variety of tasks are employed to engage and enthuse the students. Relationships between adults and students are strong and promote a positive work ethic. Students work diligently and take responsibility for their learning. Teachers' questioning challenges and develops students' understanding further. For example, in a good science lesson, students worked well together in small groups to construct circuits using good quality equipment. They then shared their learning points with each other which were then reinforced by the teacher through some quick-fire questioning.

In less effective lessons the most frequent limitations are in planning, because there is too much attention given to students completing activities and not enough to their learning. Lessons have a whole-class focus so students do the same work and for some students there is not enough challenge. Often, students are not aware of how to improve their work because the criteria for higher level work are not made explicit in the planning. At times teachers over-direct students and dominate the lesson inhibiting their opportunities to work with genuine independence.

Opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are often well developed. For example, in a Year 10 design and technology lesson, students considered the design features of the packaging of products from other countries. As a result, they appreciated the wider cultural differences as well their distinctive design elements.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The academy has quickly established a positive work ethos and harmonious relationships in lessons and around the campus. Students were keen to point out that behaviour has improved noticeably since the academy opened. This has been achieved through the promotion of clear expectations for behaviour coupled with consistent application of behaviour management policies and associated practices. Exclusions have fallen in the current year, showing that behaviour has improved. Students respond well to the expectations for behaviour that have been set within the academy. Students interviewed report that they appreciate being in smaller class sizes and feel supported through the mixed-year tutor groups. Disabled students and those with special educational needs participate and achieve because of this and the good support that they receive.

All students are supported well to develop the personal and basic skills that they need to succeed and the academy's specialist subjects make a particularly strong contribution here. Punctuality and attendance are closely monitored and appropriate action is taken to ensure that all students attend school and come to lessons on time. Attendance has risen and is now average and the number of students who are persistently absent has significantly decreased. The inclusion centre seeks to ensure the successful re-integration of students who are vulnerable or at risk of exclusion into mainstream activities. The academy can provide notable examples of improvement of individual students who have previously demonstrated significant behavioural difficulties and who have been supported to overcome significant personal problems. One such student summed up her experience in this respect saying, 'I am so proud of my school. If it wasn't for the academy I wouldn't be here at all'.

The academy is a cohesive and ordered community. Students say that they feel very safe and most are confident that any serious concerns will be dealt with swiftly. In discussion, all groups of students asserted that instances of bullying are rare, can be reported easily and are dealt with promptly. The academy prepares students well to be aware of, and deal with, specific types of bullying such as homophobic or cyber bullying.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Leadership and management have been strengthened considerably since the academy opened. As a result, leaders at all levels have been successful in bringing improvements in achievement, teaching, behaviour and attendance. The academy has a clear strategic vision that is shared by all staff. This is based on high expectations and aims to develop all students so that they are ready for further education and work. The unevenness in the progress of different groups of students is reducing and the academy's effectiveness in promoting equal opportunities is growing.

Most developments have involved importing systems from the sponsor organisation and this has enabled them to move forward effectively, including procedures for safeguarding students and for monitoring and evaluating student and staff performance. Self-evaluation, performance management, planning and target setting mesh together well so that the right priorities are identified, acted upon and monitored closely. The academy is able to offer staff a good range of professional development opportunities through its flexible working with its sponsor academy, both through training courses and placements or exchanges. The curriculum is responsive, well-considered and planned to meet the needs of all students. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is being promoted effectively through assemblies, citizenship lessons together with the active participation in a range of enrichment activities such as cultural trips and visits, or by being pen pals to young people abroad.

The Chief Executive focuses his efforts very closely on the strategic development of the academy. The governing body has a wide range of expertise based in the local community. Governors are very knowledgeable about the academy and are in a strong position to provide suitable support and challenge. Middle leaders now take on greater responsibility. They enjoy their new accountabilities and lead developments in their areas competently, ably supported by the Principal and a strong team of senior leaders. Through its track record of bringing about improvements to date, the academy demonstrates a good capacity for further sustained improvement.

External support

The academy has found the support of the School Improvement Partner particularly useful in providing an external viewpoint and in challenging it to make the necessary improvements. Highly productive links with the sponsor academy have facilitated improvements in teaching as well as in curriculum developments. The sponsor organisation, through its Chief Executive, provides support for financial, and personnel management as well as for information technology infrastructure. It provides a pool of teachers and expertise for the academy to draw on. It has also co-ordinated the acquisition of funding to support site improvements and the planned building programme.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise achievement in all subjects by ensuring that:
 - there is a clear focus on planning for the learning, as opposed to tasks, in all lessons
 - assessment information is used to match tasks to students' needs and capabilities more accurately.

- Increase the proportion of teaching which is outstanding or good by:
 - ensuring that students develop as active and independent learners
 - providing regular feedback to students in lessons on how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

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

Trevor Riddiough
Her Majesty's Inspector