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Mr N Jones
The Principal
Twickenham Academy
Percy Road
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Dear Mr Jones

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Twickenham Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Carmen Rodney, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 16 and 17 May 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, visiting 21 lessons and part lessons, where they focused on the standards of students' work. Inspectors also scrutinised documents and met with nominated staff, groups of students and representatives of the Academy Council. Members of the Academy Council included the Chair, the Chief Executive and Education Director, a representative of the sponsors, a representative from the local authority.

Context

The academy opened in 2010 on the site of its predecessor school, Whitton School. It is a member of the Learning School Trust group of schools, sponsored by Kunskapsskolan, a Swedish education group. The academy has been granted permission to add a sixth form to the current 11 to 16 school in September 2012. The academy is undergoing major building works which are due for completion in April 2013.

There are 710 students on roll. Two thirds of these are White British, with the rest from diverse minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students for whom English is an additional language is high. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is much higher than the national figure. The proportion of students who are disabled or have special educational needs is low. However, the number of students with statements of special educational needs is high, the majority of whom have been identified as having behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Achievement of pupils

Achievement is satisfactory. On entry to the academy, student attainment is low. In 2011, owing to effectively targeted interventions, 49% of Year 11 students achieved at least five A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics. This is a slight increase on the results achieved by the predecessor school. In 2011, the students' results reflected better achievement in mathematics than in English. Too many middle attaining students did not make the expected levels of progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. Particular groups, such as White British students, did not make the progress expected of them. Senior leaders recognise that pockets of underachievement persist within subjects and for individual students and have, for instance, accurately identified that students in Year 8 make slower progress in English. Consequently, this year, rigorous systems for tracking and identifying students at risk of underachieving are being used as the basis of effective mandatory support, which is carefully monitored during tutorials. The academy's internal tracking of current Year 11 students' progress indicates that, owing to early entries in mathematics examinations, moderated English coursework and intervention strategies, it is anticipated that the proportion attaining A* to C GCSE grades in English and mathematics is set to rise in 2012 to levels close to national averages, with the majority of students making satisfactory and improving progress. The academy is monitoring carefully the achievement of those students whose circumstances make them vulnerable and disaffected, those who do not attend regularly and those with special educational needs, so they are making better progress in English and mathematics this year than previously. Most students who are at an early stage of learning English make satisfactory progress.

The majority of students are well motivated and enthusiastic learners; however, some variability in their learning experiences and achievement in lessons are reflected across Key Stages 3 and 4. Inspectors observed students in lessons actively involved in their learning because the learning objectives and activities were in line with their attainment and helped to consolidate their knowledge and skills. Clear assessment opportunities, together with skilful and targeted questioning by teachers, enabled students to reflect upon and consolidate their learning. For instance, in a Year 10 mathematics lesson, students gained a good understanding of key concepts in expansion and simplification of expressions, through learning from each other. They subsequently enjoyed presenting their findings to the class. However, in a

number of lessons, activities were not consistently in line with students' attainment and did not always extend their knowledge and skills.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is satisfactory overall and inspectors observed a number of lessons where it was good. There is a positive ethos for learning across the academy and in the majority of lessons. Students settle quickly and, where lessons have clear objectives and tasks in line with their attainment, they sustain their concentration and work purposefully. In a Year 11 sociology lesson, students enjoyed using independent and collaborative learning skills and responded well to clearly structured activities. They could talk confidently and accurately about what they had learnt. However, the level of student engagement varies somewhat. In those lessons where teaching is only satisfactory, this is because students are not sufficiently challenged in their learning or do not fully understand the nature of the task. Moreover, the pace of learning is on occasion too slow, with teachers focusing more on giving information than on developing genuine understanding. There is often insufficient checking of what students have learnt before moving onto the next task or activity.

Target setting is an emerging strength of teaching through the use of the 'gold, bronze, silver' standards that relate to National Curriculum levels. Students expressed their enthusiasm for these and especially for the personalised weekly tutorials that enable them to set and review their goals with their Base Group Tutors.

The quality and impact of on-going assessment in lessons, through verbal and written feedback, vary widely so that, in some cases, students are vague about what they need to do to improve their work and attain their goals. In the main, marking of students' work does not always give students detailed feedback on how to improve their presentation and literacy skills and students do not correct their work before moving on to the next stage of learning. Teachers' guidance in some instances has too little impact, because it is not specific to the subject, for example in science. However in English, the class work of Year 10 students contained effective examples of assessment techniques that identified clearly their strengths and areas for improvement. Inspectors observed some good opportunities whereby students deepened their understanding of social, religious and cultural issues using a multi-disciplinary project approach. Students' learning is greatly enhanced by the on-line portal, as its resources encourage them to work at their own pace and, in so doing, to accelerate their progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is satisfactory and improving. Most students are keen to learn and settle quickly when given well-structured opportunities in lessons. Even when a few students interrupt learning through attention-seeking behaviour, most others remain

responsive and engaged in their work. If the activity is not sufficiently absorbing, a few lose attention and chatter.

Students and staff speak positively about the transformation in behaviour since the academy opened. Levels of fixed-term exclusions have reduced. Students report that they now feel safe in the academy and that the majority of bullying incidents are dealt with effectively. Most students' attitudes to learning now form an emerging strength, rather than being a barrier to achievement. Students show consideration for others and the majority move punctually around the academy, although inspectors observed a few students who were late to lessons and not challenged by teachers. Levels of attendance have improved significantly and are now above the national average, while persistent absence has reduced significantly to be in line with the national average.

The quality of leadership and management of the academy

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The Principal, his senior leadership team and the Academy Council have had successes in tackling the challenges of low student attainment and poor behaviour through remodelling the academy's curriculum and the tutorial system. The academy has successfully raised students' aspirations through establishing a positive climate for learning and conferring greater responsibility upon students for achieving their goals. The leadership team has rightly prioritised achievement, through strengthening teaching and the leadership of curriculum areas. The academy is now working towards strengthening subject leadership further through greater consistency in approaches and sharing of good teaching practice.

Significant changes to the curriculum mean that students in Key Stage 3 follow a 'Step Curriculum', where learning is divided into forty steps and relates to their attainment and not to their ages. This is intended to personalise learning and so accelerate students' progress. Students themselves feel that the academy listens and responds to their views. They also report that the use of the Electronic Document System (EDS) by teachers and tutors to record students' achievements and progress across all subjects helps motivate them, especially as the information is shared regularly with their parents and carers.

The academy's systematic procedures for monitoring its performance have effectively guided senior and middle leaders in development planning and further improvement. Self-evaluation is effective and reflects a senior leadership team that knows its priorities for improvement; however, not all middle leaders demonstrate this level of insight and skills. The academy generally has an accurate view of the quality of teaching but, in general, internal observations in lessons do not focus sufficiently on students' acquisition of knowledge and skills and the progress students make.

The clarity of direction and very good partnership work with parents, carers and external agencies have combined well to shape the ethos of the academy and to ensure that all students have an equal chance to do well. The academy is transforming the aspirations of most students and is strengthening outcomes. The Academy Council and the sponsor representatives are very well informed about the academy's progress and focus effectively on the priorities of improving teaching, behaviour and achievement. They provide targeted resources, support and challenge. The academy fulfils its statutory obligations with regard to the safeguarding of the students. Senior leaders know where pockets of underperformance persist and understand the considerable work that remains in order to address the legacy of low aspirations and underachievement. The impact of the changes brought about in the academy so far demonstrates its good capacity for improvement.

External support

The academy benefits from strong partnerships with academies in the Learning Schools Trust and can draw on their experience and expertise. This enables critical introspection and the capacity to embrace new ideas and ways of working.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop greater consistency in teaching and assessment across subjects, ensuring that:
 - all teachers build on the good practice identified across the curriculum
 - information on students' abilities, knowledge and skills is used to plan more consistently challenging lesson activities and tasks which extend their learning and support those who are less confident
 - the checking of learning is consistently implemented in lessons so that students can accelerate their progress
 - the marking of students' work fully informs students about how to achieve their goals and how to improve their presentation and literacy skills.
- Improve leadership of teaching and assessment by ensuring that:
 - the monitoring of the quality of teaching looks closely at students' learning and progress
 - middle leaders develop strategic and operational capacity for self-evaluation and implement greater consistency in teaching and assessment across subjects.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Academy Council and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education, Colin Diamond. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Meena Kumari Wood
Her Majesty's Inspector