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Mr P McKeown
Principal
The Bishop of Winchester Academy
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Dear Mr McKeown

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of The Bishop of Winchester Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Stephen McShane, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 19 and 20 June 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 16 lessons, 10 jointly with senior staff, scrutinised documents and met with you and other senior staff, middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors, including representatives of the sponsors, and students.

Context

The academy opened in September 2010 following the closure of The Bishop of Winchester Comprehensive School. Its sponsor is the Diocese of Winchester. The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school and operates in an area in which there are other schools that select for entry on grounds of ability. The majority of its students are White British and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is similar to the national average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is slightly larger than the national average. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is lower than that seen nationally, but provision for nine

students with a range of complex needs in a designated unit means that the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special education needs is slightly higher than usual. The academy has specialisms in mathematics, and enterprise and innovation.

There were significant staffing changes during the academy's first year including some in the senior leadership team, in middle leadership and in the support staff structure. The proportion of students in the current Year 11 who began at the predecessor school in Year 7 is much lower than usual. There are plans to open a sixth form in September 2014, and discussions are underway about developing primary provision. An extensive building programme was about to begin at the time of the monitoring visit.

Achievement of students at the academy

Students' prior attainment on entry to the academy is below national averages. Students make satisfactory progress in the core subjects. Overall achievement in mathematics and English at Key Stage 4 by the end of the academy's first year of operation was in line with national averages. This represents an improvement over the standards reached by students in the last year of operation of the predecessor school. However, the proportion obtaining grade C or better in these subjects was lower than expected given students' starting points, and this led to the overall proportion obtaining five or more good passes at GCSE being only just above the government's floor standard for attainment. Girls' prior attainment and the standards girls achieve by the end of Key Stage 4 are lower than boys', but they make slightly better progress overall. The performance of children who are looked after or who are eligible for free school meals improved significantly in the first year of the academy's operation. The progress of disabled students and those with special educational needs and students that are vulnerable to underachievement has accelerated due to the interventions put in place following regular analyses of progress.

Standard published measures of the overall progress of students by the end of Key Stage 4 in 2011 were adversely influenced by their being entered for a smaller number of subjects than is usual. This will be the case for the current Year 11, but the curriculum has been broadened for students in Year 10. The academy's data indicate that students' achievement by the end of Key Stage 4 in 2012 is likely to be only slightly better than in 2011, but the progress and quality of learning of students in Year 10 and in Key Stage 3 are improving from previously low levels. The quality of learning seen in lessons was securely satisfactory. Students are not confident learners but they listen attentively and show respect for the good planning and well-structured lessons they experience.

A number of students join the academy with low literacy levels. Targeted interventions, including an academy-wide focus on encouraging reading, have been put in place to address this and they have accelerated progress. However, the quality

of students' written work is inconsistent across subjects; in some areas opportunities for extended pieces of writing are limited.

The quality of teaching

Teaching has become securely satisfactory. There is some good practice, relatively little that is outstanding and virtually none that is inadequate. Where teaching is good, it involves teachers asking probing questions and encouraging students to think about their own responses to challenging work. Too often, however, the teaching is over-structured and reduces students' ability to identify and solve problems for themselves. There are good working relationships in classrooms, effective behaviour management strategies are employed and there is a wide range of interesting activities that engage students, including interesting texts and video stimulus. Teachers show a very good knowledge of individuals and their learning needs. This is not always translated into effective continual assessment in lessons, and questioning techniques often lack sufficient rigour to enable teachers to acquire an accurate picture of students' grasp of ideas and techniques. This compromises teachers' capacity to adapt material and approaches continually over the course of a lesson; it means that students often complete activities but there are missed opportunities to deepen their knowledge and use their ideas to stimulate further thought and exploration. Not all teaching capitalises on the significantly better behaviour of students by adopting fresh approaches and trying out new techniques.

Teaching has a positive impact on students' social, moral, cultural and spiritual development. The choice of texts studied and the examples and illustrations used in many areas provide opportunities to consider issues of race and diversity. The academy actively encourages the understanding and tolerance of different views and religious and cultural practices.

Behaviour and safety of students

Students' behaviour has improved significantly over the last two years. The academy offers a calm and pleasant environment; students behave thoughtfully towards each other. The sense of community in assemblies, enrichment activities, such as the recent Jubilee celebration day, and in many lessons is palpable. The vertical tutoring system makes an important contribution to this positive ethos. Students' attitudes to learning are positive. Students show ambition and they respond positively to being involved in the various mechanisms to gauge and support their progress, such as the mentoring programme. There is a sense of mutual trust, a respect for learning and a spirit of cooperation shown in many lessons.

Students respond well to direction. They arrive on time and are ready to work. Currently they do not have enough opportunities to drive their own learning or manage their own behaviour. Conduct around the site is very good. Students show each other respect and behave well. The management of behaviour is consistent and very clear processes of rewards and sanctions have resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of exclusions.

Support for those with social and emotional difficulties is effective and ensures that these students improve their engagement with learning, and achieve. A strong pastoral team works effectively to ensure a coordinated approach to their needs. The well-being room is an effective means of providing some calm and quiet as well as individual attention for students who may need it.

Attendance improved over 2010/11 and it is currently above average. Students feel that the academy is a safe place and value the way in which staff are readily available to support them. Parents and carers have shown increased levels of confidence in this aspect of the academy's work. This improvement in behaviour gives the academy a very good foundation on which to drive further improvements in standards.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The Principal and leadership team have a clear vision for the development of the academy, based on improvements in outcomes for students. This vision is translated into a clear and appropriate set of priorities in the academy's development plan. Self-evaluation is largely accurate, but some judgements of teaching are optimistic because they are based on the quality of teachers' planning and delivery of lessons rather than their impact. The curriculum in Years 7 to 10 is broad and balanced and meets students' needs well. Provision, such as the weekly enrichment sessions, innovation days and aspects of the work of the specialisms, offers useful opportunities for students to develop important skills as well as to enjoy applying their learning.

The academy's provision for ensuring equality of opportunities has improved. The progress of individual students in Key Stage 4 has been tracked much more closely over the last two years and good practice, such as the work of the progress panel, has been extended to Key Stage 3 this year. The quality of the data used is now reliable. There is a good concentration on the performance of identified groups, and speedy intervention when necessary. Provision for students with disabilities and special educational needs has improved. It is now systematic and well managed and there are a large number of interventions in place. The special unit has developed its provision so that students now have much wider curriculum access.

Middle leaders show a good understanding of their role and many are beginning to have a significant impact on outcomes for students. Some curriculum leaders are not yet holding their staff to account and implementing strong quality assurance mechanisms.

Communication with parents and carers is good. The academy is keen to obtain their views about the effectiveness of its work. Links between home and the academy are playing a significant part in reducing persistent absence and improving the achievement of students in difficult circumstances.

Leaders and managers have demonstrated their capacity to drive improvement through the significant changes brought about in students' behaviour and attitudes to

learning. They have worked to improve the quality of teaching with some success, although the mechanisms to improve the proportion of teaching that is good or better are not clearly established. The morale of staff and students is good in the academy and there is willingness for staff to review their practice. Governance is strong and effective. The governing body has an accurate knowledge of the quality of the academy's work and its priorities. The governors, and through them the sponsors, offer very good challenge and support.

External support

The academy makes very good use of the excellent support offered by its link National Leader of Education and the School Improvement Partner. The sponsors are active through the work of the governing body and support the provision of a full time chaplain who, along with the staff, oversees the spiritual development of students very well.

Main judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise attainment in the core subjects of mathematics, English and science, especially the proportion of students obtaining a grade C or better in these subjects.
- Transform the nature of teaching so that it improves from being securely satisfactory to being consistently good or better. This will involve a fresh approach to leading its development, that concentrates on its impact on learning, and improving assessment practices in lessons to provide teachers with frequent and high-quality feedback about students' progress so that its pace can be optimised.
- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and use it to support the development of teaching across the academy.
- Increase the rigour and the frequency of middle leaders' monitoring, and their evaluation of the impact of teaching, to enable the leaders to hold staff to account more quickly and effectively for the quality of learning.

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

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector