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28 June 2012

Mr N Hindmarsh
The Principal
Dartmouth Academy
Milton Lane
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Devon
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Dear Mr Hindmarsh

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Dartmouth Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Sue Frater, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 27 and 28 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 the academy's work, visited 22 lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, governors, staff, pupils, students and a representative of the academy's sponsors.

Context

Dartmouth Academy is an all-through academy for pupils aged from three to nineteen. It opened in September 2010 in the same buildings as its co-located predecessor primary and secondary schools. The academy will transfer to new accommodation in 2013. The Principal did not take up post until January 2011. One of the Vice Principals was previously the headteacher of the predecessor primary school. On opening the staffing of the academy was the same as the predecessor school, with one new newly qualified teacher joining. In the first year a staffing restructure saw one third of teaching staff leave to be replaced by a similar number

of specialist teachers. All teaching posts are currently filled. The academy's specialisms are in art and mathematics.

There are currently 506 pupils on roll. The proportions from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language are small. The proportion of disabled pupils and pupils who have special educational needs is above average; the proportions who have statements or are supported at school action plus are also above average.

The academy is sponsored by the academy chain E-ACT and is partnered with Britannia Royal Naval College, Devon County Council and the Consortium of All-Through Schooling.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Levels of attainment are low, but rising.

Children typically enter the Nursery with skills and abilities below those normally expected for their ages, particularly in the areas of communication, language and literacy, and personal, social and emotional development. They make rapid progress during their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage and close the gap significantly. The results of last year's Key Stage 1 national assessments and Key Stage 2 national tests were below average, particularly in mathematics. The academy's data indicate that pupils currently nearing the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 are achieving more.

The attainment of Year 11 students was low in 2011; results in mathematics were particularly low. These students did not make the progress expected given their starting points in Year 7. The academy's analysis indicates that students are on track to achieve more this year; this is supported by the results of examinations already taken by students in English, mathematics and science. Only a very small number of students took A-level examinations in 2011; they were all studying art or art-related subjects. These students' examination results were broadly average. Given their relatively low GCSE results, their progress in the sixth form was better than expected.

Students were making good or outstanding progress in some lessons, particularly in the primary phase, and at least satisfactory progress in most of the lessons observed during the inspection. Achievement in secondary mathematics is rising as a result of actions taken by the academy. Pupils are typically interested and engaged by their lessons and they have positive attitudes to learning. The progress that secondary age students make is affected by the variable quality of teaching. In some lessons, for example, they are not fully challenged by the work and do not achieve as much as they could in the time available.

The quality of teaching

Teaching is improving; it is better in the primary phase.

Monitoring carried out last year showed that a significant amount of secondary teaching was inadequate. Teaching is now typically satisfactory in the secondary phase and good in the primary phase; inadequate teaching is much less common. Classrooms are well organised, calm and orderly. A particular strength in lessons is the very positive relationships that teachers have with their classes. Pupils recognise and appreciate the improvements in teaching. They say that lessons are now more purposeful and enjoyable.

There is also some outstanding teaching. One of the lessons observed during the inspection typified the best practice. Very careful and thoughtful planning ensured that every pupil in the group was able to make rapid progress during the lesson. The teacher and teaching assistant understood the particular needs of each pupil. Activities were shaped to fit their different levels of ability. Most importantly, the context for the lesson was imaginative and exciting, and it captured pupils' imagination extremely well.

Less-effective lessons typically have one or more of the following features.

- The pace of the lesson is inappropriate. This usually means that, while the lesson activities themselves are appropriate, pupils are given much too long to complete them. They do not therefore achieve as much as they could during the lesson. At times, lessons have the opposite problem: the pace of the lesson is too rapid and many pupils get left behind.
- The teacher does not make sufficient use of information about individual pupils' targets and abilities when planning the lesson. As a result, the lesson does not challenge pupils of different abilities fully.
- There are limited opportunities for pupils to work more independently.

The quality of feedback to students is also variable. Pupils know their targets and understand how well they are doing, and some feedback provides them with excellent advice about how to improve. However, this is not universally the case and, at times, marking and feedback are irregular and unhelpful.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils typically behave well in lessons and around the academy. The challenging behaviour of a small number of pupils is managed well. There is occasional low-level disruption in a few lessons where teaching is less effective. Pupils say that they feel safe and that the small number of incidents of bullying is dealt with effectively. They say that they are confident that they can speak to a member of staff if they have any concerns. Attendance levels are below average, but improving.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The academy has made satisfactory progress in the two years since it opened. While progress was relatively slow in the first year, it has accelerated this year and there

have been some important developments. The academy now has a strong capacity to continue its improvement.

The Principal and other senior leaders are providing a clear direction and effective leadership for the academy. Their main priority has been the elimination of inadequate teaching. The systems developed to manage this, and to provide support and challenge to teachers, are innovative and well thought out. As a result, most teaching is now at least satisfactory. While this work has been the priority, teachers across the academy have also benefited from some useful training and development. These have been valuable, but plans are also in place to provide more individualised training and development for staff next year.

Senior and middle leaders monitor the academy's work well, for example by observing lessons, checking teachers' planning and looking at pupils' work. A clear and detailed schedule is in place for this monitoring. This helps to ensure that everyone understands the aims of any monitoring activities and their roles in the process.

The poor GCSE mathematics results came as a surprise last year. Senior leaders recognised that they needed to strengthen the systems used to track and analyse secondary students' achievement. This work has been done well and much has been achieved. Very good work has been done to moderate and ensure the accuracy of the judgements that teachers make about students' achievement.

Useful work has also been done to develop the academy's governance. An interim Chair of Governors was brought in to set up the governing body, develop systems and provide training. This work has been done well and he is now stepping aside to enable a local Chair of Governors to take over.

External support

The academy benefits from a wide range of external support. Anything that happens has a clear purpose and is evaluated. E-ACT provides useful support but also strong challenge to the academy's leaders, who also benefit from a range of partnership work with other academies in the E-ACT family of schools.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the consistency of secondary teaching, ensuring that:
 - lessons move at an appropriate pace
 - pupils of different ability are challenged fully
 - feedback to pupils in all subjects provides them with clear and helpful guidance about how 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

Christopher Russell
Her Majesty's Inspector