

6 December 2012

Mrs Bec Treacher
Principal
The Samuel Lister Academy
Cottingley New Road
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Dear Mrs Treacher

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to The Samuel Lister Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Gina White, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 4 and 5 December 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 met with the Principal, other senior leaders and students. A telephone conversation also took place with the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors observed 20 lessons, four of which were carried out jointly with school leaders, and visited a small number of tutor groups.

Context

The Principal and one of the vice-principals joined the academy when it opened on 1 April. An assistant principal was also appointed externally and two other assistant principals were promoted from within the predecessor school. The head of the communications faculty joined the academy in September and eight new teachers have been appointed since Easter. All staff from the predecessor school were transferred to the academy. A number of leaders and teachers from the predecessor school have left over the last two terms. The academy has found it difficult to recruit experienced English teachers but is fully staffed.

The academy is smaller than average and does not have a full roll in any year. A high proportion of students is known to be eligible for free school meals and attracts pupil premium funding. The proportion of students who are supported at school action is very high but the number supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is only slightly above average. A high proportion of students come from

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minority ethnic backgrounds, mainly of Pakistani origin, but an increasing number are from Slovakia and of Gypsy Roma heritage. A very large majority of students speak English as an additional language. Around a quarter of students did not join the academy at the usual time. Few students live close to the school and most travel by bus from the centre of Bradford.

The academy is part of the McMillan Trust and is sponsored by Bradford College.

Achievement of students at the academy

Students join the academy with reading ages and Key Stage 2 results that are below average. In 2012, the Year 11 results showed a considerable improvement on previous years. The proportion of students obtaining five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, improved by 11 percentage points. The A* to C pass rate in mathematics also improved well and is close to the national average. There was less improvement in attainment in English but the proportion of Year 11 students making the expected levels of progress in both English and mathematics increased markedly. The academy's progress data and early entry results indicate that Year 11 achievement continues to improve. Data also show that there are no gaps between the performance of girls and boys and students who attract pupil premium funding are achieving as well as others.

Students' achievement in lessons tended to reflect the quality of teaching but there were several instances where immature behaviour slowed progress despite the best efforts of the teacher. The quality of work and the standard of presentation in students' books vary with most books showing that progress is improving over time.

The quality of teaching

Improving the quality of teaching is critical to improving achievement and inspectors could see the positive impact of the training and strategies that have been introduced. Inspectors saw examples of outstanding practice but they also saw lessons in which teaching and learning were inadequate. In the joint lesson observations, senior leaders identified the same strengths and weaknesses as inspectors and agreed about the overall quality of teaching. Most teachers plan lessons that break tasks down into bite-size pieces so that learning is built securely on solid foundations. Teachers make regular checks on understanding and have good questioning skills. In the weaker lessons, teachers talked for too long or they did not respond quickly or effectively enough when the pace of learning slowed. In the best lessons, students were encouraged to think for themselves and well-planned activities enabled students of all abilities to make good or better progress. Students say that teaching is improving, working relationships between teachers and students are good and they feel confident about asking for help. The quality and frequency of marking is too variable and a small number of teachers pay insufficient attention to how students present their work.

Too many students have an immature approach to learning that hampers progress. Older students tend to be too dependent on the teacher and lack the study skills necessary to achieve at the highest levels. In the weaker lessons in Key Stage 3, the behaviour of a minority of students interrupts the flow of learning because they fail to listen carefully to instructions, shout out answers to questions and chatter among themselves.

Behaviour and safety of students

Strategies to improve behaviour and attitudes are well thought through and beginning to have an impact. The behaviour management systems that are in place are used consistently across the academy and are well understood by students but not fully effective in addressing the low-level disruption in some Key Stage 3 lessons. Behaviour around the school is orderly, despite some very narrow corridors, and movement between lessons flows well. Attendance is improving and is around the national average. The proportion of persistent absentees is beginning to reduce in response to new initiatives and extra resourcing. A stricter stance on some aspects of behaviour has led to an initial rise in the number of exclusions and this is being monitored closely. Students say that they feel safe in the academy and bullying is tackled well, especially by the new pastoral leaders. Sixth-form students have started to work alongside tutors to help improve behaviour and to give support to younger students.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Governance has been strengthened well. The new governing body has a wealth of experience of education plus further skills such as financial expertise. Governors use their skills and knowledge to support the senior leaders and to hold them to account. The Principal and the two deputy principals have a good blend of skills and a shared vision. They form a strong team and are driving improvements well. The extended leadership team has energy and enthusiasm. Some members are new in their roles but they are developing well and are supported by more experienced leaders. The quality of middle leadership is more variable and there are some gaps but these are being covered. Systems introduced since the academy opened are underpinning key developments. For example, more robust performance management is helping drive up the quality of teaching.

Leaders have an accurate grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy. They have implemented good strategies to bring about improvement that are beginning to have an effect. Leaders are fully aware that intensive support in Year 11 is only a short-term solution to raising achievement and far-reaching strategies are needed to bring about sustained improvement over time. Increasingly rigorous systems for monitoring students' progress and other long-lasting initiatives have already been introduced in all key stages. In the sixth form, for example, stronger leadership, tighter entry requirements and an improved curriculum are already showing early signs of success. Leaders are prioritising well and their ability to bring about improvement is growing as newer leaders develop into their roles.

External support

Bradford College, the sponsor, provides a very wide range of support and is a good source of specialist advice. Appleton Academy, part of the McMillan Trust, has primary provision and is helping Samuel Lister ease the transition of its Year 6 pupils to Year 7. The academy also benefits from sharing expertise with two other local schools – Beckfoot School and Immanuel College.

Main Judgements

- The academy is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all students.

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

Yours sincerely

Jan Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector