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13 December 2012

Mr N Chaaban
The Principal
Burnham Park E-ACT Academy
Opendale Road
Burnham
Slough
Buckinghamshire
SL1 7LZ

Dear Mr Chaaban

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Burnham Park E-ACT Academy

Following my visit with Raminder Arora, Additional Inspector, to your academy on 11–12 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 monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the academy's predecessor school was judged to be a school causing concern.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, observed 21 parts of lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, senior leaders, groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the academy sponsors. Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy is making reasonable progress in raising standards for all students.

Context

Burnham Park E-ACT Academy opened on 16 April 2012. The number of students is below the average for secondary schools but is rising in all year groups, particularly in Years 7 and 12. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is

average but rising. The proportion of students identified with special educational needs and supported through school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for additional government funding, known as the pupil premium, is above average. Staffing is stable but there have been significant planned changes so that a high proportion of staff are new to the academy, including those employed as senior and middle leaders.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Students' attainment is low when they start at the academy. In the GCSE examinations in 2012, attainment remained low, but the gaps between groups of students and attainment nationally narrowed. In particular, the proportion attaining five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics increased significantly from results in the predecessor school, but remained below the national average. Results also improved in individual subjects, including English and mathematics. However, attainment was low in some subjects, particularly in history and home economics. In some areas, progress improved, particularly in English, where the rate of progress equalled the national average overall. Progress also improved in other subjects such as mathematics. Although such improvements were modest, they showed that achievement is moving in the right direction. Those students who were supported by the pupil premium performed less well overall than other students in the academy, but in line with their peers nationally. Progress in terms of the students' results in their best eight subjects was low compared to that made by similar pupils nationally. Some groups did not perform as well as others, notably boys and students supported at school action and school action plus. Progress in the sixth form deteriorated and was inadequate.

Leaders and the governing body have analysed these results carefully and have made a successful start to improving provision and raising standards across the academy. Lessons observed during the inspection and data provided by the academy showed that students' progress is improving in all year groups and the gaps between groups narrowing, but this remains uneven. New arrangements in the teaching of mathematics are ensuring that lessons are targeted more accurately at the students' actual needs and so progress is improving. Interventions for students taking place outside the normal timetable of lessons are helping to raise standards in literacy. Although there is a programme of intervention for literacy outside lessons, there is as yet insufficient attention to levels of literacy in lessons across all subjects. There is also insufficient attention to the individual needs of students in lessons, particularly students supported on school action and school action plus. Initial analysis of achievement in the sixth form indicates that progress in this growing area of the academy is improving.

The quality of teaching

Lesson observations showed that the quality of teaching is improving. However, it also demonstrated that this is uneven and the rate of improvement requires acceleration. Recent appointments to the senior leadership team have injected pace, purpose and sustained high quality into teaching, notably observed in lessons delivered by the subject leaders for English and mathematics. In the best examples, students were waking up to the joys of learning and reflecting well on their own progress. Indeed, students told inspectors that teaching was more consistent and that learning had become 'more intense.' They are developing a pride in their own achievements and consequently in the academy which they attend. The best practice is typified by the good subject knowledge of teachers, their good relationships with pupils and by challenging expectations at all times. Students responded very well to the probing questioning techniques used by the teacher of a Year 12 performing arts lesson which required them to explain their views in more detail, using subject vocabulary accurately. They also responded well to assessing their own work in an English lesson involving drama activities and in an art lesson. Teaching makes a strong contribution to the social and moral development of the pupils, encouraging them to work together and making expectations of behaviour very clear. However, opportunities are missed to use the cultural and religious diversity of the academy's students to best effect. Although students are enthusiastic about the improving quality of many of their lessons, this is not yet typical of the general diet of teaching. Teaching requires improvement because lesson planning often pays little or no attention to the needs of groups of students or individuals, hindering their progress. Sometimes the pace of learning is too slow. Questioning only requires volunteers to provide a short correct answer to a simple question rather than challenging students to think and justify their responses. Improved analysis of assessment data is giving the academy an accurate view of students' progress but is not feeding into the delivery of lessons. Marking of work is inconsistent in terms of its frequency and in helping pupils to understand what they have achieved and how to improve their work. Discussions sometimes lose impetus because of a lack of clear direction and there are not always sufficient opportunities for students to reflect on their work in lessons.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Attendance in the predecessor school had been low for years, with high levels of persistent absence. In a short time, this has been eradicated; it is now at least in line with schools nationally and persistent absence has also dropped significantly. This is the result of a determined focus on getting students into school, coupled with the confidence and pride that students and their parents and carers have in the academy. Students are clear that behaviour in the school has improved and say that this is due to better teaching and clearer expectations. Lessons are rarely disrupted by poor behaviour and disrespectful manners are uncommon. Students can be boisterous in corridors between lessons but they are generally well behaved around the site. Students rightly think that there are too few opportunities for them to take responsibility in the academy. Although there have been improvements, for example

through taking responsibility for clubs and activities during the 'personal best' sessions at the end of each day, there is not an effective school council. Attendance in the sixth form has also improved but there are too few opportunities for them to participate in school life.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The Principal has an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy. In a short time, he has gained the confidence of staff, and the academy has risen significantly in the estimation of the community. Consequently, the numbers in the main school and in the sixth form continue to rise. The Principal has acted with determination and resolve to ensure that the academy has the right staff to provide the quality of teaching and care that your pupils require. He has created a team of experienced and well-qualified senior leaders, able to model best practice and take forward the work to make the necessary improvements. The Chair of the Governing Body brings a wealth of successful experience in raising standards. Members of the governing body are well qualified for the role, with a range of expertise in the fields of education, business and finance, and with strong representation of the local community. Minutes of their meetings and their policies show that they are already holding the academy to account and providing effective challenge, particularly in terms of improving teaching, ensuring that the appointment of new staff is underpinned by robust criteria and that the performance management of staff is rigorous. Senior leaders and the governing body ensure that resources are deployed strategically to provide value for money. Arrangements for monitoring the targeting of the resources from the pupil premium and monitoring their impact are at an early stage, but the academy understands the importance of bringing more rigour to the process. Policies and arrangements for this have recently been presented to the governing body. Similarly, accurate self-evaluation and resulting actions are not yet fully informed by written improvement plans drafted by senior leaders in collaboration with the school community. This is because the senior team was not in place until September 2012. Nevertheless, the process of devising these crucial documents began before the monitoring inspection and the academy is working towards their production by the deadline of January 2013 set by the E-ACT academy chain. The academy is in the process of reviewing the curriculum. In particular, it is rightly considering the time at which students make their Key Stage 4 choices, moving this from Year 8 to the more usual Year 9. It is also considering the balance of choices for science and exploring ways of ensuring that students capable of taking more traditional routes at Key Stage 4 are encouraged to do so. Low numbers taking some subjects, such as modern foreign languages and history, show that this is the correct action to take. Stronger leadership of the sixth form is ensuring that students' progress and attendance are more closely monitored. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and are taking well-conceived steps to raise its standard. Good partnerships have been made with primary schools in the community. Although there is a long way to go, the improvements made have resulted in an academy in which the students take pride. Leaders are demonstrating the capacity to raise standards for them all.

External support

E-ACT, the academy sponsors, were involved with the academy before the formal designation was completed in April 2012, providing staffing, senior leadership, resources and expertise during this time. The strong relationship between the sponsor and the academy, with regular monitoring of progress, practical support and high expectations of those employed at all levels in the academy, has continued and is fundamental to the improvements that have been made.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that accurate assessment is used to identify the precise learning needs of groups of students and individuals, and planning and delivering lessons that match them
 - increasing the expectations of the pace of learning and of the levels of achievement that can be reached for all students
 - involving the students in activities that engage their interest and awaken their sense of achievement and enjoyment of learning.
- Ensuring that written improvement and development plans for the academy:
 - identify and prioritise the most urgent actions required to raise achievement
 - contain challenging and measurable targets and identify the times at which progress towards them will be monitored and evaluated
 - make clear the accountability of those charged with delivering, monitoring and evaluating the plans, and monitoring and evaluating them.

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 published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Harrett

Her Majesty's Inspector