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Mrs Yvonne MacCallum
Principal
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Dear Mrs MacCallum

ACADEMIES INITIATIVE: MONITORING VISIT TO HABERDASHERS' ASKE'S KNIGHTS ACADEMY

Introduction

Following my visit with Robert Ellis HMI to your academy on 22 and 23 May 2007, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a first monitoring visit in connection with the academies initiative.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents, met with the principal, members of the academy and federation leadership teams, the chief executive principal of the federation, and groups of pupils.

Context

The academy opened in September 2005, in buildings previously occupied by the predecessor school. The academy is part of a federation with Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham College, with which it shares a chief executive. Almost all of the staff and pupils transferred to the academy from the predecessor school. Since then there have been a number of staffing changes; about a third of teachers have joined in the past two years. The academy is fully staffed. However, not all staff are able to sustain the demanding improvement agenda, and there has been some long-term absence. In April 2007 the academy's new buildings were opened on the site of the predecessor school. The academy plans to open a sixth form in September 2007; there are currently five pupils receiving some post-16 provision.

There are 734 pupils on roll and significantly more boys than girls in all years, except in Year 7 where the numbers are similar. The student population is largely stable as the school is now fully subscribed in Years 7 to 9. The academy serves a community that experiences significant socio-economic deprivation; almost a half of pupils are eligible to claim free school meals, nearly four times the national average. About two thirds of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds; about a third are of Black African or Caribbean origin. About a fifth of pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL) which is double the national average. About a third of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), and 24 have statements of special educational need; both these figures are significantly above the national average.

The academy is sponsored by the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers, and as such is a member of the Haberdashers' family of independent and state schools. Pupils have the opportunity to participate in activities at other schools in the group. Its curricular specialism is sports. Its commitment to the professional development of staff was recognised in February 2007 by the Investors in People Award.

Achievement and standards

Pupils enter Year 7 with attainment levels from Key Stage 2 significantly below the national average. At both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 their attainment in 2006 was below the national average. Given their starting points pupils made good progress.

In 2006 the academy exceeded its targets at Key Stage 3 in both English and science, but was slightly below in mathematics. Overall, this represented outstanding progress by pupils. The 29% 5 A*-Cs at GCSE was 4% above the academy's target, and this placed it in the top quarter of all schools for achievement. However, when English and mathematics are included the result was only 14%. Pupils made more progress in English than they did in mathematics. Boys and girls make similar progress during Key Stage 3, but girls achieve more than boys at Key Stage 4. Although standards were low, achievement was good.

Pupils are generally on track to meet their targets in Year 9, which would be at least good achievement. The academy was able to provide evidence that pupils in the current Year 11 are on track to meet their targets in some subjects. Evidence from observation and scrutiny of the tracking of pupil performance indicates that achievement in Year 11 is likely to be at least satisfactory. The academy's own data indicates that the GCSE 5 A*-C outcome including English and mathematics will be similar to last year, although the introduction of new functional literacy and numeracy courses may improve this figure. Standards, although improving, will remain low.

Personal development and well-being

Pupils are well cared for and kept safe. Vulnerable pupils receive good support and make good progress. The academy has made good progress in improving attitudes and behaviour, but recognises that there remains room for further development.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are generally positive and most pupils behave well in lessons. However, a small minority of pupils, mostly from the older age groups, do not behave as well as they should outside of lessons. Most pupils are friendly and have developed good relationships with their teachers and their peers. They say that they enjoy school and this is particularly evident in Year 7. Pupils say that they feel safe and that there are adults that they can go to if they have concerns or need advice. Student leaders provide good role models for other pupils. Attendance is below average but it has improved. This reflects both pupils' increased interest in what the academy has to offer and the impact of targeted intervention for pupils who have poor patterns of attendance. The number of permanent exclusions in the last year was very low but the number of fixed term and internal exclusions is high and does not show a declining trend. Pupils say that their religious and cultural backgrounds are respected and that are celebrated at various times throughout the year.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning varies widely across the academy; during the visit twelve lessons were observed; one was outstanding, four were good, five were satisfactory and two inadequate. Lessons taught by permanent staff were at least satisfactory. Although there is an increasing proportion of good and outstanding teaching, the academy's grading of lessons is over generous and does not take sufficient account of the quality of pupils' learning. In the best lessons teachers make good use of the time available to provide a range of interesting and challenging activities that are well matched to the pupils' needs and interests. In these lessons questioning is used skilfully to identify what pupils have learnt and to help them develop their thinking skills. In the less successful lessons teachers have not adapted their teaching for the longer sessions and their expectation of what pupils can achieve in the lesson and over time is too low and the pace is pedestrian. In the lessons seen there were few examples of pupils being actively involved in assessing their progress towards the learning objective or their progress towards their individual targets. The academy is committed to sharing good practice and there is a well resourced professional development programme which is aimed at improving teaching and learning.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the need of pupils. It is planned that from September Key Stage 3 pupils will benefit from an increased range of pathways that are more closely tailored to their precise needs. This will extend the curriculum changes already implemented in Key Stage 4. Pupils commented positively about the options available and the extensive range of extra-curricular activities that they can participate in. Pupils have good opportunities to participate in physical activity and the academy's sports specialism is having a positive impact on raising self-esteem and engaging disaffected pupils with their learning. It has also contributed to raising the profile of the academy in the local community, but it is yet to have a demonstrable effect on raising standards.

Care, guidance and support are good although academic guidance, particularly teachers' use of assessment information to plan the pupils' next steps for learning, is not as well developed as care and support. This is currently being addressed.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management have been successful in ensuring that the academy has made good progress over the past two years. The principal provides clear direction for day-to-day work and development of the academy. Strategic planning has so far focused sensibly on achieving short term goals. The very recent transition to the new building has been carefully and successfully managed. The leadership team have spent significant time and energy implementing systems to manage and improve behaviour. They have had good success in this area.

There is considerable variability in the quality of middle leadership, this is partly due to staffing difficulties arising from the transition from the predecessor school and long-term absences. There are good examples of senior leaders managing and developing middle leaders in science, drama and music. However, this is inconsistent and staffing difficulties remain, for example, in the leadership of mathematics. The academy has recently made a new appointment for head of mathematics, which it hopes will resolve these difficulties.

The systems used by middle managers for monitoring their areas of responsibility are still evolving, and they do not consistently link evaluation of pupil achievement to teaching. The arrangements used for monitoring pupil progress vary considerably in their quality across the academy. For example, in science the head of department uses a clear system which enables accurate tracking of both individual progress and examination outcomes across year groups. This standard is not yet consistent across all departments. This means that senior leaders do not have a sufficiently detailed and accurate picture of pupil achievement.

The ability of leadership and management to accurately evaluate the quality and impact of the academy's provision is still developing. There are good examples of the leadership team identifying barriers to raising achievement and intervening effectively, such as the 'Breakthrough' programme to address boys' underachievement. The senior leadership team monitor teaching, but their evaluation of its quality is not consistent and does not focus sufficiently on learning outcomes for pupils. The capacity for further improvement is good. This is clearly evidenced by: rising standards, an increasing proportion of good teaching, and improved behaviour.

External support

The academy benefits from very good support from Hatcham College. The sharing of high quality expertise, good practice and staffing has provided very effective solutions to particular challenges. Specific departments, such as science and

information and communications technology, have been enabled to move forward. External consultancy has been well targeted and provided good support.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Use assessment data to more sharply track pupil progress in order to identify and address areas of underachievement
- Strengthen the work of middle managers, particularly their evaluation of teaching and identification of potential underachievement
- Engage pupils more actively in their own learning and in the assessment of their own progress towards their targets
- Raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chief Executive Principal and Chair of Governors, for the Haberdashers' Aske's Federation and the Academies Group at the DfES.

Yours sincerely

Michael Lynes
HM Inspector