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Mr Phil Hearne
Principal
Paddington Academy
Marylands Road
London
W9 2DR

Dear Mr Hearne

Academies Initiative: Monitoring Visit to Paddington Academy

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy with Sue Kara HMI on 13 and 14 November 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 and met with the principal, nominated staff, the chair of governors and groups of students.

Context

The academy opened in September 2006 and operated on a cramped site for the whole of its first year. Having suffered serious delays, the academy moved into its brand new building three months before the visit. A new principal was appointed four months before this visit, following the departure of the founding principal. Due to the restructuring of the senior leadership team and the appointments of middle leaders, there has been an unusually high number of recent staff departures. This has been managed very successfully and has not led to a noticeable loss of staff morale or any destabilisation of the academy. It is fully staffed and very few teachers are employed on temporary contracts.

The academy serves a community subject to high levels of social deprivation; the number of students entitled to free school meals is about three times the national average. There are 1096 students on roll, including 239 in the sixth form. About a fifth of students are from White backgrounds; a fifth from Asian backgrounds, the

largest group being Bangladeshi; and a fifth of Black heritage, mainly from West Africa. About three quarters of students speak English as an additional language. As the academy is currently reviewing its criteria for assessing these students it is unable to accurately state how many are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average, though comparatively few have a statement of special educational need. Very few students have left during the past year, and a significant number have joined.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards, and good progress since the principal's appointment in July. It is certainly moving in the right direction, and has the potential to continue making rapid progress under the leadership of an increasingly confident and effective senior team. The academy's recent progress has demonstrated its good capacity to make further improvements.

Achievement and standards

The academy rightly judges that standards remain low and that achievement is inadequate. However, during this visit there was some emerging evidence to suggest that as teaching is beginning to improve so is student achievement.

Results in national tests and examinations in 2007 were exceptionally low in relation to national expectations. Although the academy met its target for the proportion of students that gained at least five A*-C grade GCSEs, this still represented inadequate achievement. It did not meet its targets in the Key Stage 3 tests. There is some evidence that achievement was better in Key Stage 3 English than in science or mathematics, as a larger number of students achieved the higher levels. Results at post-16 showed significant underachievement across a broad range of subjects.

The academy's agreed targets for the current academic year are realistic and, if met, would show an improvement in standards and represent satisfactory achievement. Evidence from lesson observations, scrutiny of students' work and the academy's own embryonic monitoring suggests that it has the potential to achieve these targets.

Personal development and well-being

Students' behaviour is satisfactory, and sometimes good. The academy's own rigorous monitoring of behaviour confirms this. It also indicates that there is still challenging behaviour, which is sometimes violent, but that this is reducing significantly. An indication of improving behaviour is the number of fixed term exclusions which are on track to be half of last year's. Students confirm that behaviour is improving and that they feel increasingly safe.

Behaviour during the visit was generally good both inside and outside of classrooms. Students were polite and courteous towards inspectors and talked openly and enthusiastically. They are very loyal to the academy and feel strongly that it is improving. A group of Year 7 students who were interviewed were excellent ambassadors for the academy. This positive attitude is supported by evidence of

good attendance, which is well above the national average. Procedures for monitoring attendance are exemplary.

Students have satisfactory attitudes to learning, but the academy is right to judge that it needs to encourage more independent learning. They are sometimes slow to set off for lessons and often need to be encouraged to do so. Students have a perceptive understanding of the quality of teaching and learning. Their views correspond with both the academy's and inspectors' judgement: that there is still too much variability in the quality and too much that is inadequate.

Quality of provision

Whilst inspectors agree with the academy that the quality of teaching and learning remains inadequate, an improving picture was seen during this visit. More consistent routines were observed across subjects, and behaviour observed during lessons was at least satisfactory and sometimes good.

All teaching observed was at least satisfactory, and there were some good elements. In a good mathematics lesson on fractions students worked both independently and in groups to complete work of a good standard. The teacher was approachable and worked well with specific students to improve their understanding. Classroom management in this lesson was of the highest order. However, not enough teachers are capitalising on the improved behaviour to teach in more interesting and engaging ways. In some lessons teachers are still too directive; they do not give sufficient opportunities to students to read aloud or to reformulate others' language. Given the very low levels of literacy of many students it is important that there are opportunities to develop oral skills across different subject areas. Some teaching is unnecessarily restrictive and does not give students sufficient chance to develop their own thoughts and ideas. Teachers do not always have an accurate picture of the prior attainment of their students, largely because of the lack of a whole academy system, and this makes pitching the work at the right level difficult. This in turn does not secure consistent progress.

The academy is currently unable to provide accurate up-to-date information on the progress of students, as the system to monitor it has only been very recently developed. It appears to be fit for purpose and is already generating some useful information, but it does not yet provide a sufficiently comprehensive picture of student achievement. The assistant vice principal now in charge of student tracking is aware of this, and is working hard to rectify the situation.

The curriculum from Years 7 to 11 is appropriate, but in the sixth form it is not well matched to the needs, interests and aspirations of students. This results in some students being on unsuitable courses and contributes to their underachievement. The academy is currently undertaking a full review of the sixth form. Students report that they would like a greater range of extra-curricular activities.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory and have clearly demonstrated good capacity to improve. The new principal leads with confidence, flair and authority. He

has achieved a remarkable amount in a very short time; not least in taking senior staff with him during a challenging period. He has quickly grasped the key issues and has taken efficient and robust action. He has a clear, long-term commitment to developing better links with the local community. He has a keen understanding of the systems and structures that are required to develop if student achievement is to rapidly improve. Strategic planning is firmly rooted in developing learning. It is still a work in progress and does not yet consistently set out key milestones or clear procedures for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the work of the academy. It is, however, based on an honest, accurate evaluation of the current position.

The principal is developing a team of senior and middle leaders who demonstrate renewed enthusiasm and commitment. They are hard working and loyal to the students. The vice principal leading on teaching and learning has worked tirelessly in difficult circumstances. She has an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and has dealt with inadequacies robustly and effectively. She approaches her role with enthusiasm and passion and has good plans to increase the quality of teaching over the next year.

The local governing body expended a great deal of energy in ensuring a smooth transition to the new building and developing their responsibilities in their first year of operation. They are at the early stages of understanding their strategic role, particularly in providing challenge and support for the senior leadership team.

External support

The academy benefits from the input of the recently appointed school improvement partner, who has a robust, accurate view. The new principal has very swiftly commissioned a number of external reviews. These are rigorous, high quality and have enabled the academy to take some tough decisions. The academy is beginning to build an effective partnership with the local authority, for example, with managed moves for hard-to-place students.

Priorities for further improvement

- Strengthen the quality of teaching and learning so that it ensures better achievement for all students

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, and the Academies Group at the DCSF.

Yours sincerely

Michael Lynes

Michael Lynes
HM Inspector of Schools