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Mr David Daniels
Principal
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Dear Mr Daniels

Academies Initiative: Monitoring Visit to The Petchey Academy

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy on 22 and 23 January 2008, 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

I observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, vice principals and assistant vice principals, a group of students, the chair of governors - who also represents the sponsors - and two other governors, two newly qualified teachers, the school improvement partner and a representative of one of the academy's major partners in providing extended services.

Context

The Petchey Academy opened to Year 7 students in September 2006. In its first year it was housed in temporary accommodation while the new building was completed. The academy moved into its new premises in September 2007. There are currently 360 students on roll in Years 7 and 8. Before admission, students sit a test to determine their ability and are divided into five bands according to the results. The academy then ensures that an equal proportion of students from each of the five bands is admitted. This means that attainment, taken overall, is broadly average on entry, although this academic year attainment in mathematics was below the national average. The students reflect the wide ethnic mix in Hackney; about half are

of Black African or Caribbean heritage and a significant proportion come from homes where English is not the first language. Few are in the early stages of learning English, however. The local area is one of considerable disadvantage and this shows in the high number of students eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than the national average. The academy is over-subscribed and draws its students from about 40 primary schools. The recruitment and retention of suitable staff is a continuing challenge for the academy, and three posts are currently filled by long-term supply staff.

Achievement and standards

Raising standards is one of the academy's key priorities. Every student has been set a target for the end of the key stage in each subject that they are studying. The targets are based on levels students reached at the age of eleven and are based on the expectation that everyone will make two National Curriculum levels of progress over the course of Key Stage 3. This is divided into smaller sub-levels so that progress can more easily be tracked. The expected rates of progress are greater than is expected nationally and the targets are challenging. To make sure that students are keeping up with the challenge, the academy regularly assesses attainment and tracks each student's progress. Current assessments show that Year 8 students are on course, overall, to reach their targets; for example 70% of students are already working at the expected Level 5 in science. Overall attainment in English and mathematics is lower than this, but students are making good progress and it is anticipated that the targets for the tests in the core subjects at the end of Key Stage 3 will be met. The academy analyses the results of assessments closely in order to identify any underperformance. There are no significant differences between different groups of students; those students identified as having learning difficulties or who are looked-after are making particularly swift progress. Steps taken to boost the progress of students of average to lower ability are showing some success and the academy is now focusing more closely on students who have the potential to reach high standards. Staff are confident that the challenging targets for these students will also be met. In a mathematics lesson, some Year 8 students were quick to grasp new concepts when working out percentages. The teacher capitalised on this by challenging them to move on to a higher level. Some responded well to this and showed that they were beginning to work at a level much higher than expected for their age.

Students discuss how they are doing in seminars with their house lifestyle consultant and think about what they need to do to make the progress that is expected of them. They have a good understanding of how well they are doing at the moment and are rightly proud of the progress that they are making.

Personal development and well-being

The academy has been successful in developing its own distinctive ethos and approach to learning and teaching, known as 'The Petchey Way'. This is characterised by the high standards that are expected of students in how they behave, dress and interact with one another and adults. The staff set a good

example themselves and they are quick to intervene, for example if a tie is not straight or bags are not placed under the table safely. The students have responded well to this. They are smartly turned out and they usually behave very well both in lessons and around the academy site. Minor misdemeanours in lessons tend to be linked to the quality of teaching. The academy's policy for managing behaviour is consistently applied and additional support, such as a young leaders' programme, is provided for the few students whose behaviour presents particular challenges. Attendance levels are in line with the national figure. Students speak very positively of their experiences at the academy and enjoy both lessons and the wide range of other activities that are provided.

At lunchtime the academy serves one meal, with options that meet students' dietary or religious requirements; no other food is allowed in the academy at any time. Staff and students eat together in small groups. This 'family service' was one of the things that students said they valued most about the academy. Students serve one another and prepare the table for others. The students' eating habits are changing for the better; on this visit many tucked in readily to Lancashire hotpot and rice pudding.

Quality of provision

The progress that students are making indicates that quality of teaching and learning is good. In the eight part-lessons that were observed, teaching was most frequently good, occasionally outstanding and, in one instance inadequate. The academy's approach to planning and teaching is consistently implemented. Teachers make very clear what the students should know by the end of the lesson and they plan tasks which are suitably challenging. There were two important features to the most effective lessons. First, students made swift progress when the teacher's subject knowledge was strong and additional challenge was introduced as soon as students showed they had a good grasp of what they had been taught. Second, good links were made between subjects. For example, in a science lesson, students argued different points of view about Darwin's theories with confidence and insight. There were minor weaknesses in teaching. For example, in a few lessons, the time left for students to complete tasks was insufficient for them to manage what they were being asked to do. Where teaching was inadequate, the lesson's content failed to capture the students' attention and they were not motivated to learn. Too much time was then taken up with managing behaviour, unsuccessfully.

School council members felt that their teachers are strict, but saw this as a positive thing. They appreciated the way behaviour is managed and the fact that disruptions to lessons were rare. Students are usually keen learners. They listen well to the teachers and sometimes make pertinent observations about the topics they are studying. They apply themselves well to their tasks, and are especially enthusiastic about the on-line mathematics challenge, for which they come in to the academy early or queue up at lunchtime to take part. However, if they are faced with teaching that does not engage their interest, they lose motivation and start to chat amongst themselves. The academy places a strong emphasis on helping students acquire the skills and competencies that they need in order to learn most effectively. Progress in this aspect of their development is tracked as carefully as their academic

achievement. Students sometimes let themselves down by not arriving with the right equipment for lessons.

The academy has adopted an innovative approach to the curriculum. Although subjects are timetabled separately, they are linked by common themes. The academy's day is long; the students experience six hour-long sessions each day, apart from Fridays which is one hour shorter. Students said that the longer day helps them to learn more and some come in well before the start of the day to use computers or other facilities. An excellent range of enhancement activities takes place every Wednesday afternoon. Many of them link to the academy's specialisms in health, care and medical science. Plans for the curriculum for Key Stage 4 and the sixth form are well advanced. The impact of the academy's specialism in health is clearly visible in the promotion of healthy eating, cooking, physical fitness and the provision of a first aid course for all students, for example. The impact of the specialism in medical sciences is less well developed, but will increase as the academy begins to teach older students in coming years.

Leadership and management

The academy's leaders have achieved much since the academy was opened. Importantly, they have established the Petchey's distinctive ethos and have a clear vision of how the academy will grow and develop as the intake expands. They also successfully managed the move from the temporary accommodation into the new building, minimising disruption to the students' learning. It is clear that the academic progress and personal well-being of each student is at the heart of what is being done. The roles and responsibilities of members of the senior team are well defined. There is a good spirit of teamwork and pride in what has been achieved so far. Regular monitoring of teaching and learning, including self-assessment by both teachers and students, underpins the academy's approach to self-evaluation. The academy knows its strengths and where further work should be focused. The governing body brings a good range of expertise and a keen interest in providing the best for the students.

The actions the academy has taken so far to raise standards have had a positive impact. Students are making good progress in their learning and in developing the attributes they will need for success in later life.

External support

The academy receives support from a number of agencies. The support has been effective in helping the academy improve its work in meeting the wide range of students' needs and in improving the quality of teaching. The school improvement partner has provided good feedback on strengths and areas for further development. The academy works well in partnership with a wide range of outside agencies and is developing some exciting links both in the UK and the wider world in connection with its specialisms. It also sees itself as part of the local community and has good links with primary schools.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

There are no priorities for further improvement in addition to those the academy has already identified.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
HM Inspector of Schools