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28 January 2009

Mr John Walton
Principal
Oasis Academy Enfield
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Dear Mr Walton

Academies initiative: monitoring visit to Oasis Academy Enfield

Introduction

Following my visit with Andrew Harrett HMI to your academy on 20 and 21 January 2009, 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.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal and members of the senior team, a representative group of middle managers, the school council, a small group of parents and the chair of governors.

Context

Oasis Academy Enfield opened in September 2007 with 180 Year 7 students as the first intake, followed by a second cohort in 2008. There are currently 360 students on roll. Sponsored by a charitable organisation, Oasis Community Learning, the academy is underpinned by a Christian ethos, and accepts students irrespective of their religious faith, ability and/or disability. When full, the academy will have over 1,000 students, including a sixth form. Plans to set up the sixth form in 2010 are already under way. Within a year of opening, the academy is heavily oversubscribed, with approximately two students for every vacant place. After being in temporary accommodation in 2007, the academy moved into a new state-of-the-art, sustainable building in September 2008.

The academy serves one of the most economically deprived and ethnically diverse areas in the country. Students are drawn from the immediate vicinity, with 37 different ethnic groups represented; the three largest groups are of African and/or Caribbean, Turkish and White British descent. At 33%, the percentage of students entitled to free school meals is above average. The proportion of students with a learning difficulty and/or disability is above average, as is the proportion of students who speak a language other than English. Since its opening, 10% of students have left the academy at other than the usual time because of the temporary living provision. The student population is now stable and both year groups have a full roll. The academy provides support for a nurture group as part of the local authority nurture group project and the National Nurture Group Association.

The academy is fully staffed with a good balance of experienced and relatively new teachers, support staff and local managing governors who fully reflect the ethnically diverse school population. All appointments to senior and middle management positions are fully in place. The academy provides extended school activities. It holds the following awards: Healthy Schools, and the 2008 Specialists Schools and Academies Trust National Conference Award for talented students. It is currently applying for the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) International School and Arts Mark awards.

Achievement and standards

Students make good progress in their learning. The academy's first cohort of students entered with standards that were below average. Standards on entry in September 2008 were broadly average but with a higher than expected proportion of students having very low literacy skills. The academy has rigorous and regular assessment procedures which demonstrate that overall students make good progress in their learning. Some groups have been identified as making less progress than others, such as students with learning difficulties in English, mathematics and science; boys in English and science; and Turkish students in English. However, the academy has been swift to put in place targeted intervention programmes for these groups and assessment data show that the gap in achievement is narrowing significantly.

Progress observed in lessons and in exercise books was good. The students have a thorough understanding of their levels of attainment and know how to improve their work. They are set very challenging targets and report that they are given helpful advice and support which makes them achievable. The academy is constantly refining its assessment procedures in subjects and for skills across the curriculum, leading to accurate identification of areas of need and resulting improvements in achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Students are proud of the academy. They are eager to show visitors the facilities and to discuss their achievements. They behave well in classrooms and public

spaces. In the relatively short time that the academy has been open, it has achieved an excellent sense of community. Students of all backgrounds get on well together and say that this reflects the academy's motto, 'Learning together, succeeding together'. Students feel safe and have confidence that the adults in the academy will sort out any problems. They speak enthusiastically about the many opportunities for activities within lessons and outside the curriculum.

There are outstanding procedures for involving students in the life of the academy. All students hold a post of responsibility within the particular teams for which they apply. They are rightly very proud of their roles. The school council is an effective body and the students, as a whole, are used to being consulted on different aspects of provision on a regular basis. The high level of commitment to pastoral care is much appreciated by the students. The policy of having 'family groups' of a dozen or so students looked after by a staff member is particularly popular. Healthy eating is well promoted by the outstanding restaurant which provides fresh food of a very high quality, expertly prepared on site. It plays its part in the extensive programme to educate the students about healthy choices and about the enjoyment and companionship of eating healthily as a community. The academy provides an increasingly popular programme of physical activities that cater for as many tastes and preferences as possible. Robust procedures ensure that levels of attendance are good. The academy's specialism makes an excellent contribution to the students' development of skills which are essential for their future success in life.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is good. The leadership team has set a challenging target to ensure that teaching is good and, overall, robust systems for planning and monitoring are ensuring that teaching is never less than satisfactory. Teachers use their good subject expertise effectively. The most successful lessons include structured planning, with short and timed activities that are closely matched to resources, which teachers use to develop students' understanding and thinking skills. Time is used well and lessons move at a reasonably fast pace as activities build one on another before students apply the taught skills. Students make good progress in their work because teachers provide feedback, use targeted questioning well, and provide them with opportunities to ask questions, intervene, and give their personal views. These approaches contribute to students developing their communication skills and deepening their understanding of the set work.

Teachers use effective strategies such as drama and group and practical work to engage students well to consolidate their learning. In turn, students rise to the challenges that are linked to clear learning objectives and the steps they need to take to reach a higher National Curriculum level. Assessment is built into planning and into many lessons; time is set aside to review students' learning and to give them the opportunity to assess their learning in order to understand the next steps needed to improve their work. In many lessons, the interactive white board is used effectively to illustrate and focus attention on specific teaching points.

In the satisfactory lessons, there is too much teacher talk and the complex language used to explain the grade criteria or learning objectives is not always clear enough for students to understand. Questioning does not ensure the involvement of all students, in particular those who are still learning to speak English. Work is not sufficiently matched to learning needs and activities are not well paced in the long double lessons.

While the end-of-module tests are marked thoroughly, the general day-to-day marking seen was variable; comments are not always given to help students improve their work and technical errors are not corrected. Despite these shortcomings, students know their targets well and assessment information is used rigorously to update parents about their child's rate of progress and what they need to do to achieve better results in the modular tests and class work.

The curriculum engages the interests of the students well. They understand its structure and speak highly of the opportunities that it gives them to make progress in their learning, make their own choices, and become independent learners. Coherent planning enables students to make connections across subjects and to see how their knowledge and skills extend beyond the classroom and the academy. The modular structure provides a good context for their learning, enabling them to make connections between subjects well. It also ensures that assessment is regular and purposeful. The popular Trips Out and Trips In programme, linked to each module, ensures that the students have regular opportunities to extend their learning beyond the classroom and to receive visitors who improve their knowledge and skills during lessons. The specialism makes a good contribution to the curriculum, and is helping to develop enterprise and workplace skills. Students say that the opportunity to make early choices about subjects increases their self-confidence and independence. The well-constructed Enrich, Extend, Embed programme provides time within the normal school day for students to take part in activities which help them to develop the important skills that they need in their learning, life and work.

Leadership and management

The academy's leadership team, under the very good leadership of the principal, has successfully ensured that the academy has made good progress in driving up standards within four terms of opening. Within a short time, the principal appointed an experienced and enthusiastic senior team who understand and share his vision of serving students through a 'can do' culture which 'nurtures confident and competent people'. The Oasis Community of Learners mission, which is sharply focused on inclusion, community and innovation in relation to learners, has been embraced by all staff, students and parents.

Leaders, managers, teachers and support staff know the community served by the academy very well. They are committed to helping students achieve well irrespective of their starting points. This is clearly demonstrated in the short- and long-term planning which identifies clear priorities linked to challenging targets. Leaders and managers have conveyed the concept of high aspirations which are rooted in well-

thought-out actions designed to ensure that the targets are achieved. For example, very good attention is paid to developing literacy skills and a range of competencies so that students are well prepared for each stage of their education. The academy introduces well-managed and staged changes to the development plan to reflect the needs of students as the roll increases annually. For instance, students have good access to mentoring and behaviour management programmes, which were introduced in September 2008.

The academy does not stand still and the approach to strategic management includes the needs of students as well as those of the community it serves. For example, diverse community groups including the Oasis Youth and Community Team are increasingly involved in the academy's work. This mutually beneficial relationship between the school and different minority ethnic community groups works well; communication is good and sound knowledge about projects, such as supplementary schools, is used to support students.

The academy takes full advantage of its location to build good links with a range of business partners. These links are providing it with opportunities to widen the business and enterprise curriculum so that students can begin to acquire a range of enterprise skills. All of these links contribute to the academy's recognition of the needs of the community, which are embedded in the vision to provide a centre of excellence which will enable students to develop a wide range of skills in preparation for the next stage of their life.

Systems for holding staff to account are embedded and used rigorously and regularly. Monitoring is cyclical and linked to teachers' performance and students' progress. There is good use of information and communication technology to compile, compare and evaluate performance management data at all levels of staffing in the academy. As such, professional development is given a high profile and linked to the whole-school, departmental and auxiliary planning. The benefit of training is spread widely through teachers and support staff sharing information. There is comprehensive use of the distributive leadership model to evaluate how well individuals and departments are meeting the set targets in relation to the academy's priorities. Data are therefore used very well to measure progress over time and to ensure that all students can have equal access to support to achieve well. The academy has put into place a strong foundation on which to build future learning and its capacity for future development is outstanding. The message about the academy as a transforming, inclusive and cohesive school comes across strongly from the very small number of representative parents who met with the inspector.

The Oasis Community Learning model of governance works well for the academy. While the board of governors handles the legal requirements, overseen by the director of education, the local academy governors are well placed to ensure that teachers can concentrate on the full business of teaching and learning. Procedures for holding the academy to account are clearly set out and effectively applied. Governors monitor the quality of provision through regular visits, reports and questioning in relation to students' achievement, attendance and behaviour. An



experienced and diverse group of governors use their expertise and knowledge of the world of work to improve the business and enterprise provision.

External support

The academy maintains very good links with local agencies, a number of local primary schools and institutes of higher education. The business and enterprise specialism is used effectively to impart learning skills and to support the transition from primary schools, while high-quality experience and expertise are shared with the local college or university to improve professional development, undertake action research, and develop courses and assessment practices linked to the curriculum. Additionally, the academy takes a leading role when working with local schools and organisations to drive the 5–19 enterprise education agenda.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that planning meets the specific needs of all students.
- Ensure that general marking identifies technical errors and helps students to understand how they can improve their work.

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

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
H M Inspector

cc chair of governors
the Academies Group, DCSF