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Mr F Green
The Executive Principal
The Leigh Technology Academy
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Dear Mr Green

Academies initiative: monitoring visit to The Leigh Technology Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Robert Lovett HMI and Grahame Sherfield HMI to your academy on 9 and 10 December 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

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the executive principal, three principals, a deputy principal, other senior staff, groups of staff, groups of students, and the chair of governors.

Context

The Leigh City Technology College (CTC) converted to The Leigh Technology Academy in September 2007. The academy has specialisms in technology, sport, and business and enterprise. It is working in a federation with the Longfield Academy and is involved as a lead school in the local teacher training consortium. The context of the academy is much the same as that for the predecessor CTC. It is much larger than the average secondary school with 1451 students including 289 in the sixth form. It has more boys than girls, 56% to 44%. The percentage of students eligible

for free school meals is below average. Just over 90% of students are from White British backgrounds. Few students are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average but the proportion with statements of educational needs is above average. The academy includes a 19 place unit for students with hearing impairment; the students are fully integrated into the academy. The academy moved into its brand new buildings in January 2008. It operates in four colleges, each with a principal. Staff and students spend a high proportion of their time working within their own college.

Students' attainment on entry to the academy is broadly average overall, although the percentage of students entering with above expected levels is lower than in a typical secondary school in view of the presence of several selective schools in the area. The proportion of higher attaining pupils is increasing, however.

Achievement and standards

The academy is building on the strengths of the CTC. At this early stage of the academy's development, however, it is not yet possible to see if all of the many initiatives to raise standards will bear fruit. Ambition is high and school data suggest that the improvements in raising standards and achievement will continue at a satisfactory pace, and possibly better, in the next year and beyond.

The progress made by students over Years 7 to 11, as seen in the 2008 examination results, was high overall and reflects the academy's care to ensure that students take courses that meet their needs and abilities. The progress of students whose attainment on entry was above expected levels is broadly average and not as high as for other students. Students take GCSE courses and also vocational courses, in science and information and communication technology (ICT) for example. A very high proportion of students, 94% in 2008, achieved five or more GCSE or equivalent qualifications at grades A* to C. The figures in 2006 and 2007, in the predecessor school, were similar. The percentage of students gaining grades A or A* in GCSE doubled in 2008 from 2007 but, at 9%, is still roughly half of the national figure. There are still, however, relative weaknesses in English and mathematics.

The rate of students' progress in English over Years 7 to 11 had been showing a downward trend in recent years. Progress in mathematics has been significantly lower than average and in 2007 it was exceptionally low. GCSE results in 2008 show that students' progress has been speeded up in both subjects. Whilst standards in English and mathematics, based on average point scores, improved in 2008 from 2007, they are still significantly below the national average. Standards in design and technology, English literature, physical education, and vocational studies, including science and ICT, were significantly above average for the students taking these GCSE or equivalent courses. Standards in humanities subjects and in modern foreign languages are significantly below the national average.

Examination results in the sixth form are much lower than average and achievement is not as high as it might be given students' results at the end of Year 11. Results in

2008 were an improvement on those in 2007 and the academy is of the view that standards in the sixth form will rise again in 2009. The proportion of students going on to university increased in 2008 from that in 2007.

Progress in lessons, based on both inspectors' observations and on the academy's monitoring records, is satisfactory with some good features. Students' progress can be attributed not only to their learning in lessons but to other aspects of provision with strengths in the curriculum and the care, guidance and support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Staff and students speak about recent changes with real enthusiasm and pride. The academy's core values emphasise enterprise, partnership, achievement and respect and are having a positive impact on students' lives. Students are confident, polite and welcoming and show a good sense of independence because the academy encourages this. They show great respect for the buildings and the high quality facilities available to them. The academy's dress code is consistently applied so that students look smart and ready for work.

Students say they feel very safe and appreciate the accessibility of staff so that any problems can be quickly addressed. Students behave very well, except in those few lessons where their interest is not fully maintained. They move around the academy calmly and sensibly. Students' skills in team working are good and support their future education and work. The academy is seeking to ensure that a greater proportion of students, than the 40% in 2008, leave Year 11 with good GCSE grades in both English and mathematics in order to improve students' future prospects. Attendance is above average compared with both national figures and those for similar schools. The percentage of students that are persistent absentees is much lower than average.

Quality of provision

Staff and students are generally excited by what the new facilities and styles of working are bringing to the quality of educational experiences. The academy has a thorough understanding of the quality of lessons. It aims to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is good or better in at least 70% of lessons. Progress has been hampered by problems in recruiting and retaining staff. As in previous years, staff turnover is high and impedes good continuity in learning.

There is variability in the quality of lessons. In the best lessons, teachers' good subject knowledge and enthusiasm result in high levels of engagement from students and good progress in learning. Students collaborate well together, supporting and challenging each other in their work. They make very good use of the extensive ICT resources in lessons, at break times and after school to carry out individual research and to pursue their personal interests. Teachers often use the many spaces available well and this allows for the development of student's

independent learning skills and promotes self-motivation and responsibility. Where teaching is less effective, time is not used well enough, or teachers often talk for too long and students' concentration and pace of work lapses. In weaker lessons, the objectives underpinning lessons are not always sharp enough and not used sufficiently to check progress and reflect on gains in learning.

There are many strengths in the curriculum and these contribute greatly to students' achievements. The most notable are in: the provision of vocational courses; the facilities that support learning, such as computers, other new technologies, and spaces for working independently; and in the wide range of extra-curricular activities, including many competitions and outside events that enhance students' experiences and add greatly to their enjoyment. The modular approach to the curriculum and assessment augurs well but has yet to be tested for its effectiveness. The academy works with many partners to enhance educational provision, for example in providing work experience for students. The curriculum supports students' personal development effectively in many ways. For example, students plan and lead almost all assemblies such as the moving and enjoyable assembly where students shared their experience of working with older members of the local community. The 'Emotional Intelligence Programme' has some good features but has yet to be tested for success. The academy's specialist subjects are strengths of the school and staff in these areas are part of a drive to support the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. The academy is aware of the need to develop further its provision for gifted and talented students.

Students say they feel supported and cared for by the college system. Tutors and senior staff know students well and monitor carefully their behaviour, attendance and well-being carefully. While all students are positive about the benefits of the mixed-age tutor groups, those joining the academy at the beginning of Year 7 particularly value the support these groups provide. Data about students' attainment are compiled well and used to set challenging targets for students' next steps in learning. The quality of academic guidance provided lesson by lesson, however, is too variable. The best marking or verbal comments tell students how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further, but this good practice is inconsistent.

Leadership and management

Leaders and managers have much to be proud of in creating this academy and in building on the successes of the CTC. Senior leaders are committed to innovation and to raising standards. For some staff, the innovations also bring challenges in the need to extend teaching styles, for example in the large teaching groups and long lessons. Whilst most staff have, or are developing, the necessary skills, others have some way to go. The academy is working with a nearby university to develop a suitable training programme.

The executive principal and the college principals provide highly effective leadership. Whilst leading their colleges, principals also each carry responsibilities across the

academy to ensure its cohesion. Governance includes strong challenge to leaders in relation to driving up standards. The quality of self-review and assessment is high at the senior level. In some cases, written evaluations on the quality of lessons do not place enough emphasis on exactly what students have learned. In view of the relative shortcomings in English and mathematics, especially in mathematics, further work is required to ensure that leaders and managers in these areas can successfully bring about the improvements the academy is aiming for. Leaders and managers at all levels are using challenging targets to raise standards both within the academy and in the local area. The specialist areas are well led and make a highly significant contribution to the overall ethos of the academy and to its overall effectiveness.

External support

Many partnerships support the work of the academy. These include work with local businesses, colleges and universities, and with the specialist schools and academies trust. The academy has an extensive programme of liaison work with primary schools, particularly in design and technology. The academy states, concerning the federation with Longfield Academy, 'The developing partnership with Longfield Academy has forced us to evaluate the effective use of all resources to ensure the continued progress of the Leigh and the further development of Longfield.' The academy is right in seeking to keep its use of resources under review.

Main Judgements

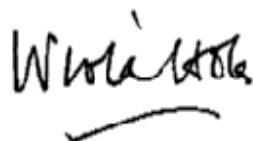
The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

No further priorities are given in this letter. The academy's own priorities are correct with the main being: the raising of standards in the sixth form, and in English and mathematics for students in Years 7 to 11; improving the quality of teaching and learning, and the quality of provision and outcomes for the most able students.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. White", with a horizontal line underneath.

Her Majesty's Inspector

cc Robert Findley, Chair of governors
the Academies Group, DCSF