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Sir Mark Grundy
The Executive Principal
Shireland Collegiate Academy
Waterloo Road
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Dear Sir Mark

Academies initiative: monitoring visit to Shireland Collegiate Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Alan Alder HMI and Elaine Taylor HMI to your academy on 2 and 3 February 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 executive principal, associate principal, nominated teaching and non teaching staff, groups of students, a representative of the sponsors and the chair of governors.

Context

The academy opened in September 2007 and is housed in the buildings of the predecessor school. It works in close collaboration with the George Salter Collegiate Academy, which is in close geographical proximity. The Academies have separate sponsors but are managed by the same Collegiate Academy Trust Board and share a set of common strategic priorities. The board is currently in negotiations with the local authority and Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) to bring about a regeneration and some new build on the current site and surrounding land. Each academy has a separate local governing body. The executive principal carries the role of head of school for both academies. The executive principal together with the associate principals from each academy and a shared director of finance make up the executive leadership team (ELT). This team meets weekly to monitor progress against the strategic priorities. In a similar way, the academy has a strategic leadership team (SLT) comprised of the associate principal, the two vice

principals and two senior assistant principals. The SLT meets twice weekly to monitor progress against the operational priorities.

The academy has experienced some difficulty in recruiting suitable staff at the middle leader level, particularly in mathematics and science. The majority of staff and students moved from the predecessor school to the academy. The academy's specialisms are currently in the arts and modern foreign languages, although the latter is under review. There are 1305 students on roll, aged 11 to 19 years, 430 of which are in the sixth form. The proportion of boys to girls varies from year to year. For example, in Years 7 and 10 the number of boys is much higher than girls but in other year groups the numbers are roughly equal. A significant number of students join and leave the academy outside the normal September start time. The academy serves a community that experiences severe social and economic disadvantage. Around 76% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and 58% of the students do not have English as a first language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals, at 38%, is well above the national average.

Achievement and standards

Students join the academy in Year 7 with exceptionally low standards of attainment. By the end of Year 11 students achieve standards which overall are below national averages rather than exceptionally low. There are however some important inconsistencies. For example, the standards achieved in GCSE mathematics in 2008 were below average, but in English they were exceptionally low.

In the 2008 GCSE examinations, the proportion of students who obtained five or more GCSEs at A* to C, including mathematics and English, was 30%. The academy has developed a thorough and accurate means of assessing students' standards. The resulting data suggest that the current Year 11 cohort will exceed the 2008 figure, even though the students joined the academy with standards lower than the previous Year 11. The proportion of students who achieved at least one pass at GCSE is in line with the national average, but the proportion who achieved five or more GCSE passes is significantly lower. There is evidence that boys' standards of work, which were declining and had fallen below that of girls, has caught up so that the boys' performance is now similar to that of the girls. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities attained exceptionally low standards in 2008. Again, the academy's data indicate that attainment for this group of students in the current Year 11 is showing improvement. The standards achieved by students who are from a Pakistani background are lower than for other groups. However, overall those students for whom English is an additional language reach similar standards to other students.

The unvalidated results from the 2008 national tests at the end of Year 9 indicate that standards in English, mathematics and science are all below national averages. However, standards in mathematics show an improvement on the previous year.

Overall, given their very low starting points, students make some good progress by the end of Year 11. The progress which students make in lessons varies from good to satisfactory. The academy has developed a system of academic coaching which is making an important contribution to raising standards. It consists of well organised coaching sessions to selected students in very small groups. The work is highly focused, being based on a close analysis of students' strengths and weaknesses, as revealed by subject assessment data. In addition, there are opportunities for coursework to be improved. Students speak highly of these sessions and the academy's evaluation suggests that the sessions help students to improve by one grade in the subjects concerned. Additional opportunities for all students to improve their learning are given through after school and Saturday morning classes.

Personal development and well-being

Students are generally well behaved. During the inspection, behaviour in lessons and around the school was good. The academy's inclusion centre is having a very positive impact. This is shown by the dramatic reduction in the number of exclusions. The use of personalised plans for students ensures that there is a successful reintegration into mainstream lessons and a reducing number of repeat offenders. Attendance rates are satisfactory overall but issues remain in relation to unauthorised absences. Nevertheless, the academy is rigorously pursuing these and has comprehensive data to ensure that every case is followed up and any patterns identified early. The academy makes good use of a range of strategies to attempt to increase rates of attendance.

Discussions with students indicated that they feel safe both in and around the academy. Instances of bullying are rare and where they occur they are dealt with swiftly. The situation is the same for instances of racism or racial abuse.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Where joint lesson observations took place between the inspectors and senior leaders their judgements were entirely in agreement on the quality of the lessons observed and subsequently the overall quality of teaching and learning. Whilst a small proportion of the lessons were good, the majority were satisfactory. Senior leaders evaluate that some outstanding teaching exists but the inspection team were unable to see any as students were told to stay at home for day two of the inspection due to the inclement weather. New technologies are having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and teachers are making good use of projectors and interactive whiteboards to engage the students and increase their understanding. The Learning Gateway, an advanced computer based learning platform, is developing rapidly as a valuable learning tool for all members of the school community. Some developments are at an early stage, but already the students are excited by the increasing level of access it gives them to materials and resources to support their learning. Access to the gateway is also provided for all parents and carers.

Teachers use a consistent approach to planning their lessons and devise sequences of activities to enable students to meet the learning objectives. The lesson plans identify the different outcomes expected from students of all abilities, but often these outcomes only relate to the quantity of work produced or the level of understanding. The planning fails to provide a range of activities which are suitably challenging for all students. The academy has had a strong focus on developing assessment for learning and there is some very good practice in some subject areas, particularly in the art specialism. In some lessons questioning is weak and teachers rely too heavily on the responses of one or two volunteers. This fails to provide sufficient information on the progress students are making to allow the teacher to adjust the teaching as the lesson proceeds.

Students' behaviour is managed well by teachers and relationships are good. However, on occasions, some teachers fail to capitalise on the positive ethos in the academy and do not allow sufficient time for students' independent learning, particularly to give students time to reflect on their learning or reinforce their understanding through discussion with a partner. This also misses a valuable opportunity to develop the students' oral skills, which could support the development of their literacy skills. Marking of students' work is too variable in quality and too often states what has been done, but not what needs to be done to improve.

The academy's specialisms are making a good contribution to raising standards. The academic targets have been achieved in both the arts and modern foreign languages. Both specialisms make a good contribution to the local community, for example by supporting the subjects' development in primary schools and, particularly with modern foreign languages, with adult learners. Overall, the academy sets challenging attainment targets for students.

Leadership and management

The academy is led well by the executive principal who, together with the executive leadership team (ELT), provides a strong strategic vision and steer for the academy. This work is supported well by the strategic leadership team (SLT) which ensures that the academy's operational priorities are being delivered and are matched to those in the strategic plan. The overarching collegiate priorities and the academy's own priorities interface well and target appropriate areas for development and improvement. Leadership and management at these two levels are good and effective. The academy's current improvement plan identifies well the targeted areas for improvement. This includes what actions should be taken and arrangements for monitoring progress against success criteria. The regular monitoring of the strategic and operational plans by the ELT and SLT is good. This provides the senior leaders with a clear and accurate picture of the strengths and areas for improvement across the academy. Self-evaluation by the senior leadership is good and senior leaders know the academy well.

Members of the collegiate trust board hold the staff to account and monitor progress well. At its termly meeting, the board is presented with a thorough and detailed progress report against the strategic priorities. Similarly, the academy's governing body monitors progress well against priorities in the operational improvement plan. However, the practice of monitoring progress through academy visits to see day to day operation is underdeveloped on the part of board and governing body members.

The role of middle leaders and managers, including zone directors and heads of department, is underdeveloped and lacks consistency. The leaders are not all monitoring and evaluating the work in their areas to a consistently high standard. Some heads of department are relatively new to post and some are in post on a temporary basis. Currently not all middle leaders are trained to a consistently high standard and consequently the way they carry out their roles and responsibilities varies in quality. Subject development plans are produced to a common format and agreed overarching priorities. However, success criteria are not always written in ways which are easily measurable.

The academy carries out all its statutory duties in relation to safeguarding students and all requirements are met well. The staff ensure that all people are treated equally and any form of discrimination is not tolerated. Links with external partners and partnership working are one of the academy's strengths. For example, this can be seen through the work with the partner academy, where staff expertise has been shared between the two institutions. Other strong partnerships exist between the local primary schools and community board. Similarly, developing and promoting community cohesion is a strong aspect of the academy's work. A main driver for this rests around the local context and setting of the academy. The academy actively plans activities and events to develop cohesion among the different minority ethnic communities. Some examples include establishing a family community board and work with 'Brushstrokes' which supports refugees, asylum seekers and newly arrived families. Last year the students organised a 'Cultural Future' music and dance event at the Symphony Hall in Birmingham which celebrated traditions from a wide range of cultures represented in the academy.

The academy has worked hard at developing an extended schools programme. Projects under this programme are impacting positively on several aspects of the academy's work including community cohesion, raising standards, and developing partnerships. One particularly effective development is a young Muslim boys' project. This runs for three hours each Saturday morning. Two hours are devoted to teaching and raising achievement in the core subject with the final hour used by the local Imam to cover faith based citizenship. Monitoring of this project has shown tangible improvements in the attainment of the boys who attend the project.

Overall the academy is in a good position to move forward. Recent improvements in standards and the leadership's clear vision, understanding and identification of areas for improvement mean that the capacity to improve is good.

External support

The academy benefits greatly from a range of useful links and partners. Support from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust is developing well and training is planned for future leaders, the technology and arts areas, and concerning students with English as an additional language. Links with local primaries are strong and one school supported the academy by training some learning support assistants in the area of reading recovery. Support from the partner collegiate academy has been strong particularly in developing the sixth form provision. The executive principal finds that the School Improvement Partner provides effective support and a good level of challenge to the academy.

Main Judgement

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that middle leaders carry out rigorous and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation to identify weaknesses and bring about necessary improvements.
- Raise standards and rates of progress by ensuring that the majority of teaching and learning is good or better through:
 - providing students of all abilities with suitably challenging activities
 - monitoring students' understanding as the lesson proceeds
 - providing clear guidance on how to improve.
- Improve the monitoring role of board and governing body members by more frequent observation of the academy at work.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, and the Academies Group at the DCSF. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Brian Sharples
Her Majesty's Inspector