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Monday 19th October 2009

Mr P Ryland
The Headmaster
Priory City of Lincoln Academy
Skellingthorpe Road
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Lincolnshire
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Dear Mr Ryland

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Priory City of Lincoln Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Nada Trikić HMI and Karen Heath Additional Inspector to your academy on 13 - 14 October 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, nominated staff, groups of students, the chair of governors, and a representative of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Context

The academy was opened on the site of the predecessor school, City of Lincoln Community College; the majority of staff and students from that establishment transferred to the academy in September 2008. A major building programme is scheduled to commence shortly. The academy is part of the Priory Federation of Academies Trust with Priory Academy LSST and The Witham Priory Academy. Each academy has its own ethos, governing committee and senior leadership team and together form a partnership sharing the Trust's overarching vision.



The academy is of average size and the students' social and economic backgrounds vary considerably. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is low as is the proportion of those whose first language is not English.

The proportion of students registered by the academy as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national figure and the percentage of students with a statement of special educational needs is twice the national average. There are a small number of looked after children. The academy's specialisms are engineering, sport and health. It has received the following national accreditations: Investors in People (IiP status), High Performing Specialist School, the Charter Mark, the Basic Skills Mark, the Careers Mark, the Healthy Schools Award, and the Sportsmark.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

The final year of the predecessor school produced one of the highest educational value added scores in the 2008 national data. This outcome was the culmination of a three-year trend of improvement against all major indicators. The 2009 provisional results, the first secured by the academy, record a decline from this positive position.

The proportion of students who secured five higher grade GCSE, 77.9%, although still above the national average regressed by nine percentage points. Similarly, the percentage of students attaining five A* - C GCSE, including English and mathematics declined to 28.3%. This figure is below the national floor target set by the government; the decline is most significant in the boys GCSE results where only 19.35% achieved the expected outcome against this key indicator. Unvalidated data indicates that 50% of students made the expected progress in English and mathematics in 2009.

Current student progress data, GCSE and other examination courses results already secured but not yet published provide some positive news, for example, 22% of students in the current Year 11 group have already secured a full GCSE in both English and mathematics. The academy acknowledges that a great deal of work is required to secure GCSE outcomes above government national floor targets.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

During the monitoring visit students displayed positive attitudes, were polite and respectful towards staff and each other. Lessons were calm and purposeful and when given the opportunity students worked effectively in pairs and groups to support each other. The academy is working hard to establish high standards of behaviour and to challenge those students not meeting expectations. As a result,



fixed term exclusions are high. Movement around the academy is generally calm and orderly. Students say that they feel safe and are confident that there is always someone to turn to if they have a concern.

Last year overall attendance declined to a point below the national average although during the same period the number of students persistently absent from school was reduced. There is some evidence to suggest that examinations results were affected by declining levels of attendance. Staff collate progress, attendance and behaviour data to support individual and group support and intervention; evaluation to identify differences between groups of students and to check on the impact of the strategies employed is less well developed. Intervention strategies used to reduce challenging behaviour have proved effective, however, those designed to tackle irregular attendance are not sufficiently embedded or evaluated.

Students are enthusiastic about the academy specialisms and the improvements in curriculum choice, facilities and equipment they have provided. Sport is a strength and students readily take on responsibility through the sports leaders programme to work with younger children in primary schools. Specialist areas have been used effectively to develop local partnerships with the university, football club and businesses. Students benefit from a range of visits, including trips abroad that broaden their horizons. The army cadet force is well regarded within the academy and local community.

Sixth form students are very positive about their experiences in the academy, and the opportunity to access courses within the federation. They enjoy positive, open relationships with staff and appreciate the quality of support and guidance given. Numbers in the sixth form are rising significantly

The effectiveness of provision

HMI visited 27 part lessons; teaching and learning were good or better in 40% and broadly satisfactory in just over 50%. Where lessons are most effective students are enthusiastically engaged in their learning, appropriately challenged, and have opportunities to work with their peers. Teachers with good subject knowledge drive forward questioning and provide a variety of approaches to learning. In the best lessons, teachers created activities that engaged students in discussions in pairs or small groups that helped them to gain in confidence and to share their ideas.

Where teaching was less effective there were too few opportunities for the students to demonstrate what they had learned. Lessons were unsuccessful when the pace of learning was too slow and tasks failed to match the students learning needs. Some opportunities were missed to maximise student participation, enhance communication skills or use targeted questions as an assessment strategy. A scrutiny of marking noted variations in style, the quality of feedback provided, and standard of work accepted by the teacher.



The academy is continually refining the curriculum to ensure that the needs and interests of students are fully met. There is clear vocational and academic progression 14-19 within the federation. Flexibility within the curriculum allows for personalised approaches, including work experience to prepare students for the future.

Nurture groups provide a safe and secure environment for vulnerable students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported. Links with parents are developing well, with regular reports to share progress information. Individual education plans are detailed and help to identify the students' learning and social needs; however, these are not always used to inform lesson plans.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The academy is already drawing strength from the federation structure although these arrangements need to develop a sharper 'critical friend' focus to help embed ambition and drive improvement. For example, data derived from monitoring of teaching and learning presents a far more positive picture than can be supported by the 2009 examination outcomes and the lesson observations completed by HMI. Inspectors found that teaching and learning were broadly satisfactory although the academy's self-evaluation provided a hypothesis that this aspect of provision might be considered good. As a result of joint observations with inspectors, senior managers recognised that academy self-evaluation has not given sufficient priority to evaluating the quality of students' learning.

The academy has a great deal of information on student attainment and progress but as yet it is not sufficiently well presented to provide a clear analysis of students' attainment and progress. The academy development plan is not presented in a form that provides a summary of actions planned, taken and evaluated in order to help leaders and managers at all levels to drive improvement and raise standards. The quality of the academy's self-evaluation is currently overly positive in some areas, although on balance, capacity to improve is satisfactory.

External support

The federation of local academies and the their governing trust provides a wide range of professional development opportunities, notably supporting the progress of newly qualified teachers and the provision of advanced skills teachers.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.



Priorities for further improvement

- Develop a more robust focus on the quality of learning in order to raise standards for all students against key national benchmarks.
- Draw from all available sources to sharpen the focus on accurate self-evaluation
- Improve attendance.

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

Yours sincerely

David Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector