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Head of Education
Greensward Academy
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Dear Mrs Stokes

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Greensward Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Paul Brooker HMI to your academy on 16 and 17 March 2010, 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 head of education, nominated staff, the chair of the governing body and a governor and groups of students. In addition, discussions were held with the school improvement partner and the executive principal.

Context

Greensward Academy opened in September 2008 sponsored by the Academies Greensward Charitable Trust with Maltings Academy and New Rickstones Academy. The Clacton Coastal Academy was added in September 2009. The predecessor school, Greensward College, was an exceptionally high attaining school and the academy operates in the same premises. All the staff of the predecessor school transferred to the academy and it is led by an executive principal and a headteacher with the title of Head of Education. The academy has specialisms in science and

applied learning. This is a change from the specialisms of technology and applied learning in the predecessor school. It has Leading Edge and Training School status.

Greensward academy is a large, over-subscribed, mixed comprehensive for students aged 11 to 18. Since opening the number of students in the sixth form has been rising. There are currently 1588 students including 238 in the sixth form. This has placed a considerable strain on rooming, as it has taken the figures over the academy's net capacity. The majority of students are of White British heritage. The proportion eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average but rising.

The academy has achieved several awards including Chartermark, Investors in People, Healthy Schools and an award for Internationalism. Aspects of the academy's work have been recognised nationally as examples of excellence. The academy holds the Recognition of Quality Award for its work related learning and for careers education and guidance.

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

When students enter the academy their attainment is broadly average but with fewer students who have attained the highest levels. The high standard of attainment in the predecessor school has been maintained and some aspects have improved. In 2009, 94% of students attained five or more A* to C grades in GCSE examinations which is the highest ever by the predecessor school and all students left with at least one GCSE or equivalent. When English and maths are included the figure in 2009 was lower than expected. The academy has taken swift and decisive action and current reliable data indicates the previous upward trend is set to resume in this year's examinations. Current figures suggest the academy will exceed its challenging target based on the performance of the top 25% of schools. From the students' average starting points this represents at least good progress. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make even better progress, but those who have already attained above the expected level for their age on joining the school make satisfactory progress as reflected in the lower proportion of A*-A grades than found nationally. Since becoming an academy progress in English during Key Stage 3 has improved. Students in the current Year 7 are making similar progress in English as in mathematics and science.

In lessons students were observed to be making good progress. Students are keen to do well and apply themselves conscientiously to their tasks. They told inspectors how they make good use across all subjects of the skills they acquire through the Opening Minds programme in Year 7.

Results in the sixth form showed significant improvement in 2009 and represent broadly satisfactory achievement. Lesson observations indicate that students make

good progress. Students speak enthusiastically about the opportunities that the academy has provided for them, and many take full advantage of the range of extra-curricular provision on offer.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The academy's vision, articulated through its mission statement places students' personal development at the heart of its work. The success in meeting these aims is evident in the lower than average number of students who are not in education or employment with training when they leave.

As a result of its continuous self-scrutiny and consequent adaptations to provision, the academy has sustained the impressive personal development outcomes achieved previously. Key performance indicators have been elaborated to gauge the extent to which students behave well, feel safe, develop healthy lifestyles, make a positive contribution, attend well and develop skills and qualities that prepare them well for the next stage of their education and later life. The academy's systematic analysis indicates that each of these outcomes is strengthening, and that key elements of students' personal development are outstanding. This includes their skills in information and communication technology (ICT) which is strongly promoted by the extensive investment the academy has been able to make in the necessary equipment. Behaviour around the academy is exemplary and even in cramped conditions students display high levels of concern for their own and others' well-being. Their punctuality is excellent and they respond well to the high standards expected of them. Sixth-form students contribute extensively to the academy and the wider community. For example, following training, they contribute to improving the quality of teaching by undertaking lesson observations. They readily take responsibility for their own well-being and that of others.

The effectiveness of provision

The academy places great emphasis on seeking to meet the very specific needs of every student. It makes good provision for its students because teaching is good and the curriculum has an impressive range of courses both academic and vocational to meet these aims. Students make good progress in lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use it effectively to plan lessons that engage and motivate students. Relationships are excellent and students' behaviour makes a significant contribution to learning in many of the best lessons. The pace of lessons is brisk but not hurried and engagement is high. The common lesson planning format ensures a consistent approach across the academy and has resulted in the vast majority of lessons being well-constructed with a range of activities, a variety of approaches and very good use of ICT to support learning. Teachers plan for a range of learning outcomes which are aimed at meeting the needs of the different levels of ability in the class. A weaker aspect of this planning is that sometimes the more able students are given insufficient opportunities to meet their objectives because all students are required to complete the same activities. In some lessons the objectives lack suitable

challenge for some groups. This slows their progress. Assessment is regular and thorough and in many lessons good use is made of self- and peer-assessment to help the students understand what they need to do to improve. Where teaching is merely satisfactory it is because teachers are making insufficient use of the information gained from assessment to plan activities that will excite students and deepen their understanding. Some excellent examples of skilful questioning by teachers were observed, but there is scope for teachers to make more use of the question and answer sessions to promote students' inquisitiveness and independence.

Academy monitoring indicates that the quality of sixth-form teaching is improving. Evidence from lesson observations demonstrates that the academy's evaluations have strengthened classroom practice. Elements of sixth form teaching are good or outstanding, but it is variable in its effectiveness. Extended lesson time is generally well used, with a good range of activities. Many opportunities are planned to develop and apply independent thinking and research skills for example by making presentations to the rest of the class, or solving problems in pairs and small groups. Where questioning is weak or learning outcomes lack precision, teaching tends to become too teacher led and students are too passive.

The most significant improvement since becoming an academy has been in the movement towards a highly personalised curriculum. The academy has made judicious use of its additional resources to strengthen provision and improve outcomes. The new curriculum model is sensibly based on a two year Key Stage 3 giving greater flexibility in Key Stage 4 programmes according to the needs of different groups of students. The curriculum enables students to be fast tracked or to have additional support for core subjects, according to their needs and aspirations. The change in the academy's specialism from technology to science has also increased the range of options at Key Stage 4 and enabled the academy to strengthen provision for students' personal development. The Key Stage 4 curriculum provides a good range of vocational options and the sixth form also offers a good balance of courses at different levels of accreditation and across a range of subjects. The change to academy status has enabled the broadening of the sixth form curriculum. There is a good balance of courses offered at different levels of accreditation and across different areas of learning.

The academy has an excellent track record, rooted in the systems established in the predecessor school, of prioritising the well-being of all its students and securing excellent outcomes, but it is not complacent. The academy has been impressively rigorous in its pursuit of excellence in the way that it cares for and supports its students in order to continually strengthen their personal development. Outcomes are systematically and robustly evaluated, and the perceptions of students are carefully analysed. This information is carefully used to target specific interventions and support any students, or groups, at risk of failure, underachievement or any who might be vulnerable in any respect.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

There is a strong collegiate approach to leadership. At all levels leaders are clearly committed to improving the life chances of all students and raising the quality of provision. This is demonstrated in very positive outcomes. Aspirational targets are set and used well. Leaders make very detailed analyses of the performance of all groups and this sharply analytical use of data, coupled with imaginative allocation of responsibility for improvement work, is ensuring the strengths of the predecessor school are being maintained and built upon successfully in some areas. Leaders demonstrate strong determination in tackling rigorously areas of weaker performance.

Training and staff development are at the heart of this work and strongly supported by training school status. In addition to building the skills of all teachers in the classroom, the academy is successfully developing leadership skills at all levels. In addition, the academy is providing effective support to other schools, including the two other local academies in the AET group. A distinctive feature of the approach to staff development is the emphasis on a longer term view of training to allow developments to become firmly embedded.

Very good use is made of technology to support all aspects of improvement planning and data collection. Self evaluation identifies accurately areas for improvement and there are many examples where the ensuing actions are highly effective. Additional opportunities provided by academy funding allow the exploration of examples of good practice, even extending to overseas, in order to inspire creative solutions to issues.

Governors are very knowledgeable and challenge and support exceptionally well. They have ensured that safeguarding procedures are of a high quality. They monitor the work of the academy each term against challenging key indicators of performance, whilst at the same time, actively promoting the welfare of staff and students.

External support

The academy has the capacity to steer its own improvement. It needs little external support because it makes good use of a range of sources, many through the AET, to support its work and carefully analyses the impact. However, it has retained productive links with the local authority and values the support provided by its school improvement partner.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards and sustaining the exceptionally high levels of attainment of the predecessor school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching to ensure that all groups of students and particularly the more able make accelerated progress by:
 - ensuring that learning outcomes are suitably ambitious and challenging for all groups and planning clearly identifies a variety of methods of delivery and range of resources to meet these objectives
 - promoting students' independence, curiosity, initiative and reflection through higher order questioning so that they are better able to drive their own learning in lessons.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State [same person at Academies Group as in cc. list below], 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

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc chair of governors
the Academies Group, DCSF [Paul.hann@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk]