

Serco Inspections
2 Wythall Green
Way
Middle Lane
Birmingham
B47 6LW

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0121 683 2033
Direct F 0121 683 2020
Kay.shufflebottom@ofsted.gov.uk



5 March 2010

Dr Andrew Campbell
Principal
Corby Business Academy
Academy Way
Gretton Road
Corby
NN17 5EB

Dear Dr Campbell

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Corby Business Academy

Introduction

Following my visit, with Rashida Sharif HMI, to your academy on 3 and 4 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 principal and other leaders, groups of students, members of the governing board and the executive principal, who is also a representative of the sponsors.

Context

There are 972 students on roll, of whom 119 are in the sixth form. The proportion of students who are from minority ethnic backgrounds is similar to that found nationally. However, there is a higher than average proportion of students whose home language is not English. The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average, while that of students who have a statement of special educational needs is nearly four times the national average. This is partly due to the fact that the academy includes a local authority designated special educational needs base for students who have moderate and severe learning difficulties or moderate learning difficulties. An above average



proportion of students is entitled to free school meals. The academy is built on a green field site on the outskirts of the town, some four miles from the predecessor school which was close to the town centre. However, the catchment area has not changed, so the academy serves the same neighbourhoods as the predecessor school; a fleet of buses transports most students to and from the academy. About two thirds of the staff transferred to the academy from the predecessor school. Although several have since left, there has been a good level of stability in staffing. The proportion of students joining or leaving other than at the normal times is higher than average and the number of applications for places has grown markedly. The academy has a business specialism. It is part of a partnership with two other local academies.

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

In the examinations taken at the end of Year 11 in 2009, students' attainment was exceptionally low. The proportion who obtained five or more A*-C grades in GCSE or equivalent examinations, including English and mathematics, was well below the minimum expected by the government, below the academy's target and was unchanged from the final year of the predecessor school. Taking the results of all students into account across a range of subjects there was, however, a small improvement in standards. Nevertheless, the overall standards reached remained exceptionally low. The progress made by the students since their national tests at the end of Year 6 was inadequate. This is true for all sizeable groups of students, with the exception of those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and receive additional support and students for whom English is an additional language. However, the students spent less than a year of their secondary education at the academy. Additionally, there were signs of improvement. In mathematics the progress made by students was in line with national averages. There was an improvement in the progress they made in English too, though not to national averages. The progress being made by those in the special unit is currently good. In the sixth form, standards are low; the progress made by students varied with the type of course being studied and ranged from satisfactory to inadequate.

The current position is showing improvement. In mathematics, some students have been entered for their GCSE examination early. The proportion of the current Year 11 cohort achieving an A*-C grade in mathematics has already exceeded that of last year. In English, the academy's data also show an improvement in standards. Observations carried out during the inspection indicate that students are currently making good progress in the majority of their lessons. Nevertheless, the academy recognises that there is a long way to go before this will result in significant improvements in attainment. In a small minority of lessons the progress being made is only satisfactory, or barely so.

Other relevant pupil outcomes



Students' behaviour is much improved. The exclusion rate, which last year was high, has reduced markedly. Incidents such as those of a racist nature have declined similarly. Inspectors observed the academy to be calm, orderly and safe; students are sensible and polite. The dining area, for example, is a convivial and welcoming environment. This has been helped by good planning: lunch and break times are staggered so that only a proportion of students are out of lessons at a time. Staff and students share the dining area, and staff have successfully provided a good model for how to behave in such an environment. The building is of high quality and futuristic design and this is one of the symbols which shows that students are valued and given the best. They respond well, though in lessons students tend to be compliant rather than enthusiastic learners; but lessons too are settled. Attendance has shown a good improvement. Last year it was below the national average while so far this year, it is above.

The effectiveness of provision

Provision is good. Teaching is of good quality, though there are some important inconsistencies in practice and a few lessons which are barely satisfactory or inadequate. Teachers know their subjects well, relationships between teachers and students are good. In the most successful lessons observed, assessment was used very effectively to assist learning. For example, in a science lesson, the teacher very quickly recognised that students were having difficulty with some work. This resulted in a well-judged change of approach, to good effect. Generally, assessment information is used well to ensure that students of different ability are well challenged, though this is not universal. In some lessons, an assumption is made that the quality of students' work will reflect their ability. This is not always the case: in some there is not sufficient monitoring by the teacher with the result that some more able students do not produce work of the sophistication of which they are capable. The marking of students' work is generally good, with accurate and helpful comments about why a piece of work is good, or how it can be improved. There are inconsistencies however in the extent to which students respond to the advice they are given. Questioning is also of generally good quality, with students being challenged to think and give reasoned and sometimes quite lengthy answers. In some of the less successful lessons, questions were often responded to only by a small minority of students because the teacher was happy to take answers from volunteers rather than to ensure that others responded. As a result the attention of some students wavered. In these lessons too, there were too few opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills.

The curriculum is well adapted to cater for the range of abilities. For example in Years 10 and 11, while some students take GCSE mathematics early and also follow an additional GCSE in statistics, others study fewer subjects and have the opportunity to follow work-related courses. For all, there is a good mix of academic and vocationally-orientated courses, which are related to possible future employment. For younger students whose literacy skills are underdeveloped, there



a programme designed to bring about improvement. While this contains much that is of value, the emphasis on the use of phonics and other strategies in developing reading skills is insufficient. The development of literacy skills, other than speaking and listening, during lessons is not consistent enough. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities and extra tuition for students who are falling behind. The business specialism is used extensively to enrich the curriculum and to raise the aspirations of students. The sixth form curriculum has a good range of courses, with a particular strength in business-related subjects. It has led to many students being the first in their families to aspire to a university place.

The teaching day is longer than in most schools, so that more learning can take place. The structure of the day is such that lessons are much longer than is the norm and lunchtime is shorter. This has benefits in reducing movement around the academy, with fewer disruptions to learning as a result.

The quality of care, guidance and support are good. The statutory requirements for safeguarding are adhered to. Students say that they are well prepared for their next stage of learning including when they join in Year 7. Students who have learning difficulties are well integrated. The academy is at pains to ensure that all students benefit from its work.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders show a strong sense of purpose. They have developed a strong ethos in which it is clear that all students are valued. Senior leaders are highly effective in embedding ambition, and leadership at all levels is good. There is detailed and accurate evaluation of the academy's work to reveal the strengths and to identify areas for development. This includes regular monitoring of teaching quality. There is a good range of strategies to ensure that the quality of teaching develops further, and the academy's records show that this is having an impact. Subject leaders have a good knowledge of the strengths of teaching in their departments and where support is required. They are well supported, and held to account, by those who have oversight of their work. Good quality evaluations of the academy's work, combined with improvements in attendance, behaviour, the quality of teaching and the early indications of performance by current Year 11 students, show that the capacity to improve is good. Governors provide good opportunities for the academy's links with business. They have a good awareness of its strengths and where it needs to improve. However, they have too few opportunities to see its day-to-day work first hand.

The school improvement partner provides frank appraisals of the academy's work, and has provided valued expertise in developing leaders' judgements of teaching and learning. The local authority, along with the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, has provided good support in the establishment of the special unit. The



executive principal has been instrumental in developing significant aspects of the academy's organisation.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise standards and develop the quality of teaching and learning further by:
 - increasing the emphasis on the assessment of learning during lessons so that immediate steps can be taken if students' learning is not as expected
 - ensuring a more systematic approach to the development of literacy skills
 - providing the support and challenge necessary to eliminate any inadequate or barely satisfactory teaching.
- Seek ways of enabling governors to have more direct contact with the academy during the working day so that they can hold the leaders robustly to account.

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

Alan Alder
Her Majesty's Inspector

