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Mr Andrew Chubb
Principal
Archbishop Sentamu Academy
Hopewell Road
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Dear Mr Chubb

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Archbishop Sentamu Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Jan Bennett HMI to your academy on 4 and 5 February 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education 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 yourself, groups of students, the vice-chair of governors who is a representative of the sponsors, and members of staff.

Context

Archbishop Sentamu Academy opened in September 2008 in the existing buildings of its predecessor school. Sixth form provision was introduced in September 2009. New buildings are currently planned for completion in 2011. The academy is sponsored by the Church of England through the Diocese of York. It has subject specialisms in health science, and business and enterprise. It has formed partnerships with the city council, the primary care trust, two universities and a rugby club.

The academy is of average size with 920 students including 13 in the sixth form. It serves an area which experiences severe social and economic disadvantage; the proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is more than twice the national average. Nearly all students are of White British heritage and there are very few who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with



special educational needs is well above average but the proportion that has a statement to meet their special educational needs is below average. The academy is fully subscribed in the lower year groups and few join or leave the academy during the five years of secondary education.

Over the last year, several new appointments have been made to the senior leadership team, whose structure continues to evolve to meet priorities. A number of other new staff joined the academy in September 2009. Suitably qualified teachers have been recruited in all subjects and additional staff have been appointed to support students' attendance and progress. The academy's day has been reorganised into three teaching periods of a 100 minutes and a house system has been introduced.

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

Students join the academy with standards that are below the national average. The average attainment of students is slightly higher in younger year groups. Information about the prior attainment of students at the predecessor school indicates that those transferring into Years 10 and 11 underachieved significantly during Key Stage 3. Teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2009 confirmed that a legacy of underachievement persists. However, outcomes had improved in English, mathematics and science and more than two thirds of Year 9 students met their challenging individual targets, indicating that strategies to close gaps in their prior learning have begun to have a positive effect. School targets were met in mathematics and science, although not in English.

Provisional results for 2009 confirm that 76% of students attained five or more A* to C grades in GCSE or equivalent examinations. Over 90% attained at least two A* to C grades in science, one of the academy's specialisms. No student left without at least one pass and 94% attained at least five pass grades at GCSE. These results met the academy's targets and reflect students' strengthened overall progress. The progress of students with lower prior attainment and special educational needs was exceptionally good. No groups underachieved, but the academy recognises that there is scope for those with higher prior attainment to achieve more.

The proportion of students gaining five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics rose to 29.7%. This figure remains below the National Challenge target of 30% and the target set by the academy. As the academy realises, it has some way to go before students' progress in both the key subjects of English and mathematics is consistently good enough to make up for past underachievement. Weaknesses in numeracy and literacy skills, particularly in reading, act as a barrier to learning for many students. Although actions taken to improve standards in reading skills have met with some success, the academy recognises that further work is required to ensure that literacy and numeracy skills are developed effectively across the curriculum to enable students to achieve greater success in their learning.



A wide range of data is being used to set challenging targets. Regular progress updates identify where students are at risk of underachievement so that action may be taken to overcome obstacles and accelerate progress. The academy selects data to analyse the performance of different groups of learners in order to plan appropriate interventions and to monitor progress towards targets. Better systems have helped the academy to consolidate improvement in achievement in its second year, and it is now able to evaluate with increasing precision the impact of strategies used to raise students' achievement.

Academy leaders have adopted an effective approach to raising standards. During a period of transition, solid foundations on which to build better achievement have been laid. A strong emphasis has been placed on raising teachers' expectations of what students are capable of achieving. This has been supported by a suitable programme of staff training to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to support developments in the curriculum such as: the thematic programme now operating in Year 7, the use of modern technology in learning and the developing emphasis on literacy skills and work-related learning. Students report favourably on the changes that have taken place; where teachers use new approaches with confidence and skill, many students are more confident to participate actively in their learning and make better progress as a result. However, while the quality of teaching has improved, there is inconsistency and as a result, the progress made by learners is uneven.

Strategies have also been introduced to raise achievement and standards in the short term. For example, as part of the drive to improve the proportion of students gaining good GCSE passes including English and mathematics, students in Years 10 and 11 have been entered early for a range of examinations. National Challenge funding is being used to provide additional individual tutoring and mentoring for students in Year 11 to raise standards in mathematics and English. The results already attained by students who are currently in Year 11 indicate that the academy is closer to reaching this target this year than it was at the same point last year.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The academy has established a community in which students feel safe and secure and are becoming more socially aware. Students' loyalty to the academy was evident during the inspection. Good relationships are a consistent feature of lessons and less formal parts of school life. Students are taking on increasing responsibility: for example, not only do 'academy ambassadors' support younger students and assist around the school, but they have also been trained to evaluate lessons. Students say the introduction of a new house system has helped them build stronger relationships with each other and staff. It has also motivated a competitive spirit which has had a positive impact on attitudes and attendance. Cultural awareness is developing: evolving links between each house and a community elsewhere in the world are beginning to foster healthy curiosity about other continents and ways of life.



Students' attitudes to learning are positive, especially where lively teaching engages them in challenging activities. The great majority of students have responded well to the higher expectations of behaviour communicated by staff. Staff, students and governors report that standards of behaviour at the academy have significantly improved since it opened. Staff act as role models and manage inappropriate behaviour more confidently, so disruptions are kept to a minimum. Students said they appreciate the clarity with which discipline is applied and that lessons are disrupted less by the poor behaviour of a small minority of students. The use of exclusion has greatly diminished. Students isolated as a consequence of behavioural problems are carefully prepared for reintegration into lessons.

Students' enjoyment of school is enhanced further by a variety of opportunities which encourage them to try new experiences and develop healthy and satisfying interests. The importance of good attendance, smart appearance and punctuality is rigorously reinforced and promoted. The combination of close monitoring, firm guidance and competition with an improved curriculum and climate for learning is proving effective: attendance improved to 91.5% last year, and current levels are better. Attendance and punctuality in Year 11 has improved in line with other years. Students feel that they are well supported to realise their aspirations and to move on to post-16 studies. They value the efforts made by staff to broaden their experiences, for example, through residential courses, adventurous challenges and visits to universities.

The effectiveness of provision

The academy has established a system for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning that informs leaders of where strengths and weaknesses lie. Inspectors' judgement of the quality of teaching and learning aligned quite closely with that of the academy's leaders. Of the lessons observed, 94% were satisfactory or better and 47% were good or outstanding. The teaching of mathematics has improved significantly as a result of effective leadership of a newly formed team. The extensive programme of staff training is also having positive impact. This was reflected, for example, in the large number of observed lessons which made use of a progressive sequence of varied activities to involve students and give them opportunities to practise and review a range of skills. Students appreciate the increasing use made of improved resources to help them learn. Teachers are using more detailed information about students' prior attainment and recent progress to pitch work at a suitably challenging level. In the best lessons seen, teachers were also skilful at checking all students' understanding and adapting their approaches to ensure that all made positive progress.

In the best lessons, teachers' high expectations and enthusiasm for their subject capture students' interest and motivate them to learn. Skilful use of questioning helps students to solve problems and extend their thinking effectively. Teachers listen to students' responses and build on them, and their marking and comments give students a clear picture of what they have achieved and what they need to do next. Students enjoy working together in groups and respond well when they are



actively involved in their learning. They are more confident to ask their own questions and are beginning to make connections between different areas of learning.

In less effective lessons, intended learning outcomes are not always clearly enough expressed and lesson plans do not always set out the steps in learning that enable students of all abilities and needs to make the progress they might. Opportunities for students to participate actively or to take responsibility for their learning are more limited. Teachers sometimes talk for too long and students lose interest and occasionally become restless. Opportunities are missed to reinforce the development of literacy or numeracy skills or to allow students to assess their own learning. On occasion, students are not held sufficiently to account for reaching their goals and drift off-task or rely too passively on their teachers to point them in the right direction.

The academy has improved the curriculum offered to its students. Changes are framed by a determination to overcome entrenched disadvantage by preparing every kind of student to contribute to the community and economy. The plans recognise the need to radically improve literacy, numeracy, learning and work-related skills. One manifestation is the skills-based thematic programme introduced in Year 7, designed with input from the youngest students. New subjects like Chinese, applied courses and functional qualifications have been introduced to broaden the available pathways. The improvement in students' progress by the age of 16, and the reduction in the numbers who are not in employment, education or training are an indication of the early positive impact of the more flexible and responsive curriculum. The academy's first small post-16 cohort is now working towards Level 2 and 3 accreditation in health and social care. The developing provision for health science illustrates the positive influence of the academy's specialism and its productive partnership with the local primary care trust, which has provided sophisticated resources and good work placement opportunities.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal and vice-principals have won the confidence and trust of staff and students through their committed and effective leadership. In order to create a culture of aspiration, service and achievement, the academy has provided new opportunities for students, together with increasingly high expectations. Students and parents have received these changes well. Evident commitment on the part of staff has aided the implementation of the many changes set in place since the academy opened. Staff report that expectations of them have been high but that they feel supported by the leadership and training they have received to contribute to the improvement strategies in the development plan. Leaders and managers at all levels speak with enthusiasm about the changes that have taken place.

The academy's development plan for the current year is being implemented with energy. The senior leadership team has been restructured and its roles and methods of communication are evolving. New assistant vice-principals are being closely



supported to understand their roles and their accountability for implementing parts of the development plan. Advanced skills teachers for English and mathematics, suitably guided, have done much to support less experienced colleagues. The improved performance of the mathematics team indicates the impact of senior and middle leadership on a once weak area of provision. The work of the academy is systematically reviewed. Systems to monitor student progress have been effectively overhauled and data are being used better at all levels to accelerate progress. The academy's National Challenge Strategic Group draws together middle and senior leaders who are firmly focused on clear objectives and able to review and coordinate action effectively. Staff at all levels have shared good practice and new ideas through the Sentamu Improvement Group. The impact has been to build the confidence of staff to reflect on their practice and to adopt new approaches to teaching which have a greater impact on students' learning.

Governors bring a broad range of expertise to the role of providing support and challenge. Away days and links with senior staff have helped them explore their role. Through the principal and vice-principals they have received regular reports on the progress made in the academy and performance against key indicators. They are developing routines to ensure that policies are systematically reviewed.

External support

Academy leaders have used external support judiciously to support the implementation of their development plan. The principal has valued the support and challenge provided by the Department for Children, Schools and Families through the review of students' standards and achievement conducted by its school improvement partner. Useful partnerships with key organisations in the community are helping to build students' aspirations and confidence. Academy leaders and governors value the tangible contributions of the sponsor to provision for spiritual development.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise standards, particularly in English and mathematics
- Improve the proportion of lessons where learning is good in order to accelerate students' progress further.

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

Susan Bowles
Her Majesty's Inspector

