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Mr Peter Walker
Principal
Evelyn Grace Academy
255 Shakespeare Road
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Dear Mr Walker

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Evelyn Grace Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Cathie Munt HMI to your academy on 20 and 21 January 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, the chair of governors, heads of the two schools, staff and students.

Context

The academy is one of eight institutions under the sponsorship of the ARK foundation. It has been awarded specialist status in mathematics and sport. The academy opened in September 2008 with a full complement of Year 7 students. In 2009 they were joined by the next cohort of students; therefore the school is operating within Key Stage 3. Currently, the students are housed in two separate purpose-built temporary buildings. The academy's new accommodation is set to open in September 2010. Under the leadership of the Principal, two headteachers lead and manage the learning and education of students on the two separate sites. Each of these units is designated a 'small school' in line with the academy's philosophy that students will be taught in small schools where they are well known as individuals. The intention is that this will rise to four small schools on reaching full



capacity. In January 2010 an acting head was internally appointed to manage one of the schools. In the last academic year the academy has made eleven newly qualified teacher appointments. As the number on roll increases, the academy will be appointing further staff.

There are 330 students on roll at the academy of which just over half are eligible for free school meals. The academy is a diverse community which encompasses a wide range of nationalities and cultures. The largest proportion of students is of Black African or Black Caribbean ethnic heritage. Over a quarter of the students speak a language other than English at home. Over forty per cent of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

In 2009, the majority of Year 7 students attained National Curriculum levels above the academy's expectations. The academy reports that the majority of students met or exceeded their challenging targets resulting in students making outstanding progress from their low starting points in 2009, especially in mathematics and science. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieved as well as their peers. Current data indicate that students are set to meet or exceed their targets in 2010. The good use of data has enabled the academy to effectively scrutinise students' performance in all subjects. No groups of students underachieve. In the lessons observed by inspectors, students' made progress that was on many occasions good. The quality of students' learning in English, for example, is consistently good. In the majority of lessons seen students had an impressive understanding of the National Curriculum levels they were achieving.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students are of the opinion that the school is a very safe environment. They were adamant that bullying is not tolerated, but that if any occurs staff will deal with it rapidly and effectively. They feel well supported by staff to do their best. A student said 'we meet great people (in school) who love and care for us' whilst another said 'we don't waste time. They want us to succeed and do well'. In lessons students showed a positive attitude towards learning and adhered well to the academy's routines. The majority of students understood how these routines were helping to develop the necessary skills to achieve highly. There are extensive opportunities for students to engage in sporting activities and participation rates are very high. They enjoy it greatly. Students come well prepared to learn. They are punctual and attend regularly.

The effectiveness of provision

Grades awarded by inspectors for lessons were broadly in line with the academy's own assessment of its quality of teaching. In the better lessons, teachers, demonstrated very good subject knowledge and lessons progressed at a good pace. In these lessons, inspectors observed the effective use of self-assessment by students. Some good examples of marked work were seen, where students were given clear steps about what they needed to do to improve their performance. Despite this, overall the marking of students' work is variable. In some instances, marked work did not provide students with sufficient guidance to enable them to improve rapidly. Some examples of extremely effective oral and written feedback were observed. Learning assistants work well with teachers to provide effective support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers' use of the interactive whiteboard is consistently effective. Lesson planning is of a high order throughout the academy and is a major factor in ensuring parity of provision for all students. Despite the good planning some lessons are not delivered as effectively as they might be. In these lessons, teaching does not sufficiently meet the needs of all abilities within a class, particularly for the more able students. Teachers' assessment of students' learning is not always sharp enough. Consequently, it does not always enable them to confirm students' progress sharply enough.

Leaders have been innovative in tailoring a curriculum that is focused on improving the life skills and aspirations of all students. The academy day operates between 8.30 and 17.00, allowing significant amounts of time to be allocated to the basic subjects of English and mathematics. Within this timeframe, five hours a week are dedicated to sporting activities giving students an extended opportunity to improve their physical fitness and to develop leadership and management skills through teamwork. The additional hours allocated to develop mathematical conceptual thinking is having a positive impact on student achievement. The academy notes that the Key Stage 3 curriculum is defined by 'Depth before breadth rather than by breadth and balance.' It is intended to introduce a wider range of subjects once the students have a secure baseline in English and mathematics. A large proportion of Year 8 students are participating on the 'Urban Maths Scholar Programme' at Brunel University and are enjoying the experience.

Evidence from parental surveys in 2009 and 2010 show that parents have a high level of satisfaction with the academy's provision of care and guidance. Students confirm that view and inspectors agree. The academy works exceptionally well with parents prior to their child's entry and this strong relationship continues. Learning team leaders build up a secure understanding of each students' academic and social development thus enabling staff to provide timely and well structured support. Well designed processes and procedures provide a high level of support to individuals and groups ensuring that they achieve in line with high expectations. Highly effective structures are in place to support more vulnerable students and this contributes



positively to their good development and well-being. In the last two periods of each day there is specific provision for students who have fallen behind or missed lessons through absence to catch up on their learning. This is effective in enabling them to keep up with their peers. The length of the school day has been designed specifically to promote the safety and well-being of the students as they are not travelling at vulnerable times.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The proactive Principal has been extremely successful in sharing the vision of the academy and developing a strong team of able and dedicated staff. There is a shared sense of vision and purpose that focuses on developing the student as a highly ambitious learner. The successful creation of a well-ordered and safe learning community over the last four terms is testament to the staff's capacity to improve. Roles and responsibilities are well-defined. Leaders are supporting the large proportion of newly qualified staff well, through carefully planned staff development days. These are devised following the rigorous analysis of teacher performance. Academy self-evaluation is accurate, leading to ambitious target setting. Some improvement planning documents are overly detailed making it difficult for leaders to easily assess the impact of their actions. The Principal and the local governing body review developments regularly and have taken difficult decisions when necessary to secure the continued development of the academy. Senior and middle leaders understand their role in developing the academy's ethos, although one member is very new in post. All staff clearly support the work of the academy. Their dedication and diligence has had a very positive impact on the outstanding progress students achieved in the first year. The academy is rapidly developing a good reputation in the local community. The Principal, ably supported by the finance and resources manager, is preparing extremely well for the move to the new purpose-built accommodation.

External support

The sponsors provide the academy with an appropriate level of support that recognises the skills and ability that reside within the academy staff and has enabled students to make a good start to their secondary education.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- To eradicate the inconsistencies in teachers' marking and feedback within subjects and across the schools.



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

Samantha Morgan-Price HMI
Her Majesty's Inspector

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

Once the school has had 24 hours to report any factual inaccuracies, the post-visit letter is copied as appropriate to the following:

- Appropriate authority - chair of governors
- DCSF - Academies Group Paul.hann@dczf.gsi.gov.uk

The letters should also be copied electronically to:

paul.brooker@ofsted.gov.uk - the HMI with national responsibility for academies
each member of the inspection team,
the PO for SCC

A copy with editing marked up should be forwarded to the:

- lead HMI