

Serco Education
Boundary House
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
Ann.morris@ofsted.gov.uk

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Mr David Millar
Oasis Academy
Homefield Road
Old Coulsdon
Surrey
CR5 1ES

Dear Mr Millar

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Oasis Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Sheena McDonald HMI, to your academy on 3 and 4 February 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 Executive Principal, the Principal, other nominated staff, groups of students, and the chair of governors who is also the representative of the sponsors.

Context

Oasis Academy Coulsdon opened in September 2008 as an 11-16 academy. It is housed in the same accommodation as its predecessor school. A rebuilt and refurbished building, including a new post-16 centre designed to cater for 250 students, will open in September 2011. The academy has subject specialisms in science and technology with business and enterprise. The academy is non-selective and is sponsored by Oasis, a global charity committed to providing shelter, health and education to vulnerable people around the world. Amongst the full time staff employed is a well-being coordinator who was a primary care trust nurse. A community police officer is based in academy for three days a week. The academy leases part of its grounds to 'Brightsparks', a company providing nursery care for

children aged 0 – 5. The academy was awarded healthy schools status in January 2010.

The academy attracts students from a wide range of social backgrounds. There are currently 629 students on roll. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average, as is the proportion that have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Strategic leadership is provided by the Executive Principal, who has been in post since September 2008. A Principal for the academy was appointed in September 2009. The vast majority of the staff transferred from the predecessor school to the new academy, although there was significant change in the senior leadership team with the appointment of a new principal, two new deputy principals and one assistant principal.

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

Since the opening of the academy, staff have been successful in creating a positive learning environment. Good improvement has been made in students' attainment in GCSE examinations. The percentage of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C rose from 51% in 2007 in the predecessor school to 63% in 2009. The proportion of students gaining five good passes at GCSE including English and mathematics in 2009 increased from 35% to 44%. Although, the 2009 results are still below the national average, the rate of improvement over a relatively short space of time, particularly at Key Stage 4, is good.

Standards at the end of Year 9 are well below age-related expectations. Standards are low partly as a result of a legacy of underachievement as well as a lack of consistently good teaching. A small but significant proportion of students have poor attitudes to work, listening skills are generally weak, and students' responses to questions are often brief and expressed in partial sentences. However, more robust systems introduced by senior leaders are beginning to have a positive impact; for example on the attitudes of learners.

The academy's most recent tracking of information indicates that attainment and the rate of students' progress are improving. More students are on course to reach their targets or are working at appropriate levels for their age. These improvements are underpinned by better teaching. The recently introduced system for monitoring attainment and tracking progress is robust, which has resulted in interventions that are targeted more specifically at groups and individual students.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students respond very positively to the academy's strong ethos. Students from all year groups belong to five different 'families'; these arrangements contribute to the

positive ethos of the academy and enhance inter-age group relationships. Relationships between students, and between staff and students, are characterised by good humour and respect which promote students' maturity and confidence. The majority of students' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good and students thrive when given opportunities to take responsibility for their learning. They are very loyal to the academy and feel strongly that it has improved. Students report that behaviour has improved due to the consistency of practice and the high visibility of senior leaders. An additional indicator of improving behaviour is the clear reduction in the number of fixed term exclusions. Students feel valued and listened to and they make positive, but not uncritical, contributions and suggestions about how the academy could improve further.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching and learning seen during the inspection was always at least satisfactory with much that is good. More good teaching was observed in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. In the very best lessons teachers are successful in creating a classroom environment where students enjoy learning through challenging, stimulating and varied activities. Teachers use mini plenaries to recap on learning and make good links to the next phase of the lesson. Students are generally attentive and focused on achieving well. There is a sense that students are becoming more active participants in evaluating their own progress rather than passive recipients of teachers' feedback. Students commented that they appreciated the way teachers try to make lessons interesting and enjoyable.

The gap between satisfactory and good lessons tends to be as a result of variability in teachers' experience, expertise, subject knowledge and confidence in using assessment information to inform day-to-day planning and learning. Although all lessons are planned with a view to ensuring that activities are matched to different learning needs, further refinements are necessary. In some of the satisfactory lessons, the activities are pitched at the average ability students and as a result there is insufficient challenge for more able pupils or support for those who find the task difficult.

Curriculum provision is improving. Additional courses are now provided, such as the BTEC courses, which better meet the needs of the full range of students. The students speak highly of these changes. Students in Year 11 appreciate the laptop computers provided by the academy. However, very little evidence was seen during this visit of information and communication technology being used to enhance learning across all subjects. Good links have been established with primary schools to support transition. The provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, although currently satisfactory, is improving. For example, effective additional small group work in Year 7 is helping students make rapid progress in their learning. An extensive programme of enrichment opportunities help

to widen students' experiences and include a good number of sports and music clubs.

The academy knows its students very well and the level of care is exemplary. The systems for ensuring the health, safety and well being of students are rigorous, clear and effective. As a result of the consistent implementation of these systems and the high visibility and approachability of staff, students feel very safe in school. They feel able to speak up and report concerns knowing that something will be done about them. The academy is building very good partnerships with external agencies to make sure that vulnerable students are given the best support possible.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The Executive Principal and the Principal provide very strong leadership that is clearly focused on raising standards and promoting the well-being of learners. They have a clear vision for the academy and have created a team of staff emphatically focused on raising standards. The monitoring of teaching is rigorous and is suitably linked to staff development. For instance, teachers have received training in strategies to develop a wider range of teaching styles to ensure the active participation of all students. However, the impact of this is not yet evident across both key stages. Although, attainment is now satisfactory in Key Stage 4, further work is required in Key Stage 3. Although senior leaders provide a powerful vision and clear direction for the academy which is understood by all including students, they have not woven their strategic priorities into the individual subject and area plans. This means that there is not a systematic evaluation of progress against these strategic priorities.

The strategic leadership team has developed a collaborative and cohesive senior management team who have a strong commitment to raising standards; senior leaders know the priorities for the future, and what needs to be done to transform their vision for high achievement into action. Management systems enable them to have open discussions about professional development and the academy's progress.

The role of middle leaders is being developed appropriately to place more emphasis on their responsibility for the quality of provision and the standards attained in their areas. Middle leaders are challenging weak practice and providing support to remedy weaknesses. They are working hard to limit the barriers to students' engagement and motivate students to reach their potential.

The strategic leadership team has been keen for the academy to be an integral part of the local and wider community. The academy is working closely with its support agencies, primary schools, colleges and employers and is successfully promoting community cohesion. The governing body supports the academy effectively. There is

regular discussion on strategic and operational matters in order to ensure that the progress and quality of the academy's work remains on track.

External Support

The academy's Improvement Partner visits regularly and provides useful reports on its work. The principal has ensured effective links with the local authority in order to develop students' basic skills of literacy and numeracy. The leadership team has commissioned a number of external reviews to ensure they are robustly scrutinising their practice and are working closely with consultants to raise standards further.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve provision and outcomes in Key Stage 3 by tackling the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning so that all students have the opportunity to engage in consistently challenging learning.
- Use assessment information more precisely to plan learning activities that provide suitable challenge for all students especially those who are more or less able.
- Ensure that information and communication technology is consistently used to enhance students' learning.
- Ensure that the strategic development plan informs the subject and area plans and is systematically evaluated.

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

Kekshan Salaria
Her Majesty's Inspector