

Suite 22 West
Lancs
Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 1231231
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566930
Direct F 01695 729320

01 July 2010

Mr Bernard Dickenson
Principal
Shelfield Community Academy
Broad Way
Pelsall
Walsall
WS4 1BW

Dear Mr Dickenson

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Shelfield Community Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Ceri Morgan HMI and Trevor Riddiough HMI to your academy on 29-30 June 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, including 25 lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, vice-principals, nominated staff, the managing director of Ormiston Academies Trust and groups of students.

Context

The Shelfield Community Academy predecessor school, Shelfield Sports and Community College, was a satisfactory school which applied for academy status in order to improve the quality of education and raise standards. The academy has retained its specialism in sport and added English and literacy as an additional specialism to overcome the problems of students who have weak literacy skills. The



headteacher of the predecessor school was appointed as principal and the leadership team was strengthened by the appointment of an additional vice-principal. The Sheffield Community Academy opened in January 2009 as part of the Ormiston Academies Trust. All staff transferred from the predecessor school. The academy opened in its existing premises and construction of the new buildings is due to start in summer 2010.

The Sheffield Community Academy is a large school. There are currently 1322 students on roll, including 205 in the sixth form. The numbers in the sixth form are increasing: some students transfer from other local schools to study in the sixth form. The academy has retained the admissions criteria of the predecessor school as part of the local authority's admission procedures, as well as allocating up to 24 places on the basis of students' aptitude in the academy's specialist area of sport. Students' attainment on entry is below the national average. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is almost double the national average and the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. A very large majority of students are of White British heritage and the number who speak English as an additional language is very low.

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

The academy has successfully raised achievement levels above those of its predecessor school and has made significant progress in further raising standards. In GCSE examinations in 2008, 30% of Year 11 students in the predecessor school gained at least five A*-C grades, including English and mathematics. In 2009, after just two terms, the academy matched this figure. However, results achieved this year show that 39% of students have already reached this benchmark and this figure is expected to increase when further results are confirmed this summer. Standards in mathematics and English have both risen significantly but they remain low when compared with national figures. Results for science are also low, because the majority of students only follow courses which lead to a single GCSE or equivalent. Other indicators, for example, to average total points score, show standards to be above average.

Students make good and often outstanding progress, and there is no discernable difference between the progress of different groups of students. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress at a similar rate to their classmates. The academy also ensures that students, who may otherwise fail to complete their studies, follow an adapted curriculum and this prepares them well for their futures, including for some continuing to study post-16.

Students start in the sixth form with standards which are well below average. Despite average standards overall, the progress made in different subjects is very variable. It is slow in some, particularly in Year 12. Retention rates also vary considerably and are currently around 83% across all subjects but with some dips in specific subjects. Although there is room for improvement, this represents a



significant increase on retention rates in 2009 which were as low as 65%. In A level courses, currently too few students reach the higher grades in core subjects such as mathematics and English. However, many students gain the grades required to continue their studies at university. The choices of courses and location of university is expanding to reflect the increasing confidence of students. Many are the first members of their family to continue into higher education and increasing numbers travel beyond the Midlands region to further their studies.

The academy makes good use of challenging targets to support its drive to raise standards. The recently introduced system to track how well students are progressing towards their targets is starting to be used effectively by staff but, as yet, there are still a variety of different systems being used. Assessment information is collated systematically and is used to target specific intervention and support for individual students who are in danger of falling behind. Evidence from lesson observations, alongside the academy's assessment data and analysis of unvalidated examination results, indicates that students make good and often outstanding, progress over time.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students respond well to the effective climate for learning that is created within the academy. Very good relationships exist between adults and students who respond positively to the academy's aspirational ethos. Students rise to the expectations to maintain high standards in their appearance, behaviour and attitudes. They are polite and their behaviour in lessons and around the academy is good. Attitudes to learning make a clear contribution to students' academic progress and their personal development. There is no evidence of disruptive behaviour and fixed-term exclusions have fallen from a peak of over 700 in 2004 to none in the current year: a much improved situation. Students show respect for one another and their environment; they feel safe and are confident that any serious concerns will be dealt with swiftly. For example, students said there were very few incidents of bullying and they all knew who to turn to if they were in any way concerned.

Students have a wide range of opportunities to make a positive contribution to the academy's development, for example, in designing elements of the new buildings and they feel that their opinions are valued. Attendance has risen and last year was above average. There has also been a significant decrease in the proportion of students who take a large amount of time off school.

Preparation for the next stage of students' education and for their futures is improving with rising standards and improving personal development. Many students take full advantage of the very wide range of extra-curricular provision through the sport specialism as well as music and drama.

The effectiveness of provision

The academy makes good provision for its students through excellent pastoral care which supports students well, good teaching and a developing curriculum. The curriculum, whilst meeting students' needs, is being radically changed from September. There are clear pathways which allow students to make coherent progress from Year 7 to Year 13. Greater time is planned for science in Key Stage 4 so that students who do not follow separate sciences, can cover the content for a double award course. Students take examinations at different times and then go onto to higher level courses. This ensures that students are assessed when ready and not by age. Students who find school difficult are very well supported by appropriate adaptations to their curriculum.

In the sixth form, provision is largely based on a traditional AS and A level curriculum, supplemented with additional vocational courses. As a consequence, there is a satisfactory range of subjects on offer. The curriculum has been revised and there are plans to offer an increased range of vocational courses from September 2010. Recruitment to these courses has already proved buoyant and the total number of students joining the sixth form is expected to rise to around 240. The more appropriate course offer should help to reduce the drop-out rate and has already proved attractive to students.

The quality of learning is good. In the best lessons, teaching is well planned with learning activities being matched not only to the learning outcomes but also to the needs of the students in the class. Lessons have a fast pace which maximises learning and creates a sense of urgency. Learning activities focus on progressive steps which are well explained and effective assessment informs planning for the next stage. Good relationships between staff and students are highly productive. However, when teaching is only satisfactory, planning identifies the tasks to be completed rather than the intended learning outcomes; lessons are often too dominated by teachers and there are limited opportunities for students to work independently. Assessment is used well to plan lessons at the correct pitch, to track progress against targets, and to inform students how they can reach the next stage or level in their learning. The majority of students know their current levels and their target grades and they are clear about how to reach the next stage in their learning. Work is marked frequently and informs students how to improve.

Procedures for pastoral care are very clear and well structured so that staff know their students well. They provide a very high level of care and support to meet the individual needs of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Additional mentoring and carefully tailored support ensures students whose circumstances makes them vulnerable, including looked after children, succeed at the academy. For some, support continues after they have left. The 'Team around the Family' approach means that students and families with especially challenging backgrounds receive cohesive support. The academy is seen as a centre of excellence for many aspects of care, guidance and support and is being used



increasingly to develop and demonstrate good practice within the local authority. Sixth form students feel well supported when applying to universities.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders give a very clear steer and ensure the academy has an ambitious strategic vision that is shared by staff at all levels. There is a firm belief in ensuring individuals all succeed and the academy is highly inclusive. There are clear policies and procedures in place, including those for safeguarding students and for evaluating performance. However, some are relatively new and as yet leaders have not consistently monitored their implementation to identify areas which need further development.

The leadership of the sixth form has recently changed and the new leaders have set themselves challenging targets for achievement, including refining the monitoring procedures. Currently, the information this generates lacks precision and is not able to be used to set strategic targets for improvement.

The specialist areas are used well to support improvements to teaching and to extend the work of the academy within the community. The academy's self-evaluation is accurate, including inputs from all curriculum areas and is effectively used to identify priorities for improvement through development planning. Governance is strong and effective. The Trust governing body has a clear strategic oversight of the work of the academy, with sub-committees who report to the full governing body. Governors are very knowledgeable about the academy and are in a well-informed position to provide suitable support and challenge. The academy has demonstrated, through its sustained improvement, that it has a good capacity to improve.

External support

The academy makes good use of the external support provided by the Ormiston Academies Trust and this has been successful in raising standards in English and mathematics. The local authority utilises the expertise within the academy to improve local practice via close links with support services and a wide range of partners. The academy values highly the support provided by its School Improvement Partner.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Build upon the success to date to raise standards in English, mathematics and science, by:



- ensuring all staff take the opportunities to improve students' literacy and numeracy skills in lessons
- extending opportunities for students to study a double science qualification at Key Stage 4.
- Reduce inconsistencies in students' progress in the sixth form, by:
 - monitoring the implementation of the new vocational courses
 - ensuring students make better progress in Year 12 and a greater proportion continue their studies into Year 13.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by ensuring that staff consider how students learn effectively and adapting their teaching accordingly.
- Improve the effectiveness of recently introduced systems and procedures by ensuring leaders, at all levels, rigorously monitor and evaluate their impact upon learning and raising standards.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Group at the Department for Children, Schools and Families. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

