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Iain Denning
Principal
Kettering Buccleuch Academy
Weekley Glebe Road
Kettering
NN16 9NS

Dear Mr Denning

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Kettering Buccleuch Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Michael Smith HMI to your academy on 9 and 10 December 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection 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, senior leaders and nominated staff, groups of pupils and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Context

The academy opened in September 2009 as a through school for pupils aged four to 19 years following the merger of three separate schools. It operates on three sites but a new building on the site of the secondary part is due for completion in 2012. The academy has specialisms in mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT) and sport and is sponsored by the United Learning Trust (ULT). The Academy serves the northern area of the town of Kettering. The community is predominantly White British. An above average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals and an average number have special educational needs

and/or disabilities. The academy faced a challenging start owing to a lack of detailed information available to the new leadership on opening. Almost three-quarters of the staff were employed in the predecessor schools.

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

Standards remain low but are rising steadily across all key stages, especially in Key Stage 2. Attainment is above average at the end of Key Stage 1. It is broadly in line with national averages at end of Key Stage 2 in mathematics and reading, but still below average in writing. Standards are rising in Key Stage 4, having been static for several years in the predecessor school and in the first year of the academy. Current data, based on the extensive information now collected on the progress of individual pupils, shows standards in Key Stage 4 are rising further this year and are on track to be significantly closer to the national average than in 2010.

Progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils have made satisfactory progress, with good progress now evident in mathematics. Progress slows in Key Stage 3 and is inconsistent between subjects. New assessment procedures are in place and are having a positive impact on the academy's ability to identify underachievement early and take remedial action. Students in Year 11 in 2010 had made slow progress by the time they left the academy, but the current cohort is on track to exceed the challenging targets that have been set for them. The small numbers who make up the different groups make satisfactory progress. Those known to be eligible for free school meals, students with English as an additional language and those the academy has identified as needing additional help with their learning are on track to meet their targets. However, the progress of those with a statement of special educational needs is less secure, because systems to identify and precisely target support for this group are still being refined and improved. Girls and boys make similar progress.

Students make at least satisfactory progress in lessons. In some lessons some groups of students make better progress than others. Where progress is slower the work that students receive is not matched well enough to their level of ability or they are required to move on in their learning before they are ready.

Outcomes in the sixth form are satisfactory, at present. In 2010 attainment was high in the academy's specialist subject of sport, but low in one other specialist subject, namely mathematics. The increasingly positive impact of the third specialism of ICT is seen in the developing ability of teachers to use technology in their lessons to promote good engagement and enjoyment. From relatively low starting points students make satisfactory progress in the sixth form.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Across the academy there are very positive relationships between adults and pupils who respond well to the academy's ethos and expectations to maintain high standards in appearance, behaviour and attitudes. Students are polite around the

sites and their behaviour is often good. In some lessons they are compliant but not fully engaged in their learning. This is often when work is not sufficiently demanding or engaging, or when they complete tasks quickly. Most incidents of weaker behaviour are minor and occur when pupils lose concentration. There is little evidence of disruptive behaviour. Students respond well to positive encouragement and in all year groups value the rewards they can gain. For example, those in Year 11 can earn credits towards the cost of their end of year prom. Exclusions have fallen this year and the number of students who have been excluded more than once has also declined. The academy has surveyed student opinions and is using their responses to identify key areas of concern. An example of this is seen in action taken following a survey where a significant proportion of students identified bullying as an issue. The academy has introduced a variety of measures to reduce bullying and ensuring all students know a member of staff who they can go to if they are concerned about any personal matters. Students spoken to by inspectors were happy that these actions are having a positive effect.

Attendance rates have improved and across all years are now at least in line with national figures, and in some cases above. There has also been a significant decline in the proportion of students who have considerable amounts of time away from the academy.

Students are taking advantage of a range of opportunities to make a positive contribution, for example by acting as class ambassadors or supporting younger students. A majority of boys take part in more than five hours of exercise a week, but the proportion of girls is significantly lower. The academy has identified more opportunities for girls to increase their participation in sport and physical education. This is by extending the options available, including providing an increased number of sessions for dance.

The new leader of the sixth form has made a positive impact on raising expectations and students are responding well to higher demands regarding smart dress and attendance, which has risen sharply this term. Many make a strong contribution to the life of the academy by working as mentors to younger students and by setting a positive example.

The effectiveness of provision

The academy accurately judges the quality of teaching to be satisfactory at present but with a growing proportion that is good or better. Any remaining inadequate teaching is being strenuously tackled.

For children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2, the quality of teaching is more consistent. It is characterised by the active engagement of pupils in their learning. In this phase, teachers' planning is securely founded on assessment information and lessons include lots of opportunities for the children to think for themselves. In some lessons in Key Stage 3 progress is slower, because teachers do not provide a range of activities designed to meet the individual

needs of the students. In these lessons, although the lesson plan highlights the different outcomes expected for different levels of ability, all students are required to undertake the same tasks. Teachers make insufficient use of targeted questioning. In some lessons some groups of students make better progress than others. Where progress is slower the work that students receive is not matched well enough to their level of ability or they are required to move on in their learning before they are ready. In Key Stage 4, less successful lessons are dominated by the teacher and restrict students' ability to develop the skills they need to be independent learners. The impact is seen in the sixth form where teachers have to work extra hard to develop these skills, so important for further study. An example of how successfully students can develop such skills when given the opportunity was seen in an outstanding example in drama. The building blocks of how to be a successful student in the subject had been securely established in the earlier part of the course and were now contributing to excellent progress in Year 11. Students demonstrated their outstanding ability to improve their own and each other's work in a highly constructive and mutually supportive fashion. Across all key stages students and adults enjoy good relationships. Modelling by the teacher of what is required to be successful is used well in many lessons, for example in physical education. Interactive white boards are being used increasingly well and teachers in some subjects are using technology, such as digital cameras and computers, imaginatively to engage and support students in their learning. For example, in a physical education lesson observed, students in Year 10 used video cameras to analyse the precise body movements required for a basketball technique.

In Key Stage 2 cross-curricular projects which are exceptionally well planned enable students to concentrate on learning skills as well as subject content. They also provide excellent opportunities to develop links with parents when they come in increasingly large numbers to enjoy the products of this work. This is now being extended to pupils in Years 7 and 8. In the upper part of the academy, the curriculum is being enhanced to include a wider variety of options and pathways, for example construction and motor vehicle studies. The academy is working to extend opportunities in both Key Stage 4 and the sixth form by working with local providers and schools. The new head of the sixth form has sought the opinions of students and additional subjects will be available next year in order to meet a wider range of preferences.

Pastoral care is good and the academy has been successful in working with individuals whose circumstances make them more vulnerable to reduce the risk of exclusion and to improve attendance. There is an emerging whole academy ethos as pupils learn more about each other across the different sites. A team of form tutors for Year 7 classes has been established in order to develop the skills necessary to support students when they transfer into the school from other partner primary schools and when they transfer from Key Stage 2.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The Principal provides very strong leadership and has ensured staff morale is high through a difficult first year of operation. There is a very clear drive for improvement. New appointments have strengthened leadership at all levels. All members of the academy community are committed to improving outcomes and raising standards for all students and are using increasingly challenging targets to achieve their aims. The recently reconstructed senior leadership team has the necessary skills and experience to steer the academy's work and training is now underway to develop middle leaders so they can take an increasing role in monitoring and evaluating work in their areas of responsibility. Members of the governing body and representatives of the sponsors challenge and support well. Monitoring is thorough and based on a wide range of evidence including the growing database of students' progress from the thorough tracking activities undertaken. Training on assessment and moderation activities has ensured the reliability of the data. Senior leaders understand the strengths and weaknesses of teaching well and professional development is well matched to individual needs. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving steadily and standards are rising. The academy's capacity to improve is satisfactory and is increasing steadily. In order to extend it further and especially to ensure there is better teaching and learning, coaching and mentoring are being developed. All staff are taking a more active part in development work through the teaching and learning communities which have been established. Development plans are used effectively to set priorities and as working documents to check progress against these.

External support

Support from the United Learning Trust is strong, both from the main organisation and through academies in different regions working effectively together. Academy Principals benefit from training together and sharing common issues. Good support has been received from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust in terms of continuing professional development. Staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage are receiving good support from the local authority and this is helping to develop the provision further.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of good or outstanding teaching by:
 - ensuring teachers make full use of the academy's information on pupils' progress in order to plan challenging opportunities in lessons for all groups

- extending the range of assessment techniques used by teachers in their lessons to enable them to judge more accurately when students are ready to move forward in their learning
- actively promoting students' ability to work independently.
- Strengthen partnership working with other organisations in order to extend the range of subjects and courses on offer in Key Stages 4 and the sixth form.
- Build on the success in the primary phase by sharing best practice across the other key stages in order to ensure pupils gain maximum benefit from a continuous and consistent experience.

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

Yours sincerely

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector