

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

T 0300 123 1231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566930
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email: chuxley@dfbt.com

26 November 2010

Mrs Rachel Kidd
Principal
Dixons Allerton Academy
Oaks Lane
Allerton
Bradford
BD15 7RU

Dear Mrs Kidd

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Dixons Allerton Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Gina White HMI to your academy on 24 and 25 November 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, staff, groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Executive Principal who also leads the sponsoring academy.

Context

The academy opened in September 2009 and works in partnership with its sponsor, Dixons City Academy. It is housed in the building of the predecessor school: there are plans to begin a new build next year for completion in 2013. Almost all the staff of the predecessor school took up posts in the academy and staffing is stable. The academy is larger than the average secondary school with 1156 students on roll, including 180 in the sixth form. There are more boys than girls. Students come from many ethnic backgrounds: just over two-thirds are of Pakistani heritage. Almost half

the students speak English as an additional language, a very high proportion compared with the national average. Five students are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is high. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average, although the number of students with statements of special educational needs is much lower than average. Many more students join and leave the academy at other than the usual times. The academy's specialisms are health and science and the academy has gained Healthy School status. It has also been recognised as an Investor in People.

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

Results of the 2010 GCSE examinations show that, compared with the performance of the predecessor school, attainment rose in the first year of the academy's operation. The proportion of students gaining at least five good GCSE passes climbed steeply. There was a marked rise in results in both English and mathematics, although only a small increase in the percentage of students gaining five or more good GCSE passes including English and mathematics. Despite these gains, attainment remains low compared with national averages. Results in subjects linked to the academy's specialism were also low.

From attainment which was much lower than average when they joined the academy's predecessor school, Year 11 students' achievement in 2010 was satisfactory overall. However, their rates of progress varied widely, with girls outperforming boys by a considerable margin. This unevenness is evident in students' current rates of progress which, while satisfactory overall, ranged from outstanding to inadequate in the lessons observed. Where learning was strongest, students were thoroughly engaged by interesting activities that were well matched to their abilities and built effectively on their existing understanding. They collaborated well with their classmates to complete activities and reflected realistically on their learning. However, in some lessons where tasks were mundane, students were passive and took little responsibility for their learning. They were heavily dependent on adult support to make any progress.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The academy is successfully fostering positive attitudes to learning. Developments linked to its specialism in health play a key role in this. A holistic approach is being promoted through courses taught as part of the learning family programme, a choice of extra-curricular activities ranging from ballroom dancing to boxing, and growing self-awareness emerging through the 'humanutopia' programme. Students who have participated in this articulate an increasing sense of personal responsibility and willingness to be role models or 'heroes' for their peers.

Behaviour has improved and is satisfactory overall. Students welcome this as a significant change. A shared understanding by both staff and students of a new behaviour management system, with rewards and sanctions, has been central to this. The high level of exclusions in the last academic year is much reduced this term. Attendance improved markedly last year and levels of persistent absence reduced. Nonetheless, attendance is low compared with the national average and the number of students who are persistently absent is above average. Punctuality to school has improved substantially.

The sixth form

In 2010 AS and A-level results improved but overall students did not achieve as well as they should have. Leaders and managers have made root and branch changes to the operation of the sixth form and the benefits of this are quickly becoming evident. Staff and students alike say that achievement is now at the heart of the sixth form's operation. Those students for whom this was not a priority have left. Appropriate admission criteria have been set and, alongside improved information, advice and guidance have ensured that Year 12 students have been recruited to courses which match their needs and aptitudes. The curriculum has been better tailored both to meet students' aspirations and to play to the academy's strengths. There is suitable emphasis on broadening experience and developing skills needed for the next stage of life. It will be some time before the full impact of these changes is evident but early indicators are positive. Attendance has increased and truancy reduced substantially to date this term when compared with the similar period last year. Nonetheless, further improvement in attendance is needed if students are to maximise their opportunities to achieve as well as possible. Only a very small number of students need repeated reminders about issues such as timely homework. Students value the support they receive from tutors and say that staff are always willing to give up their time to help with work.

Students are clear that their views are taken into account. Requests for improved information and communication technology (ICT) equipment, study and social facilities have been met promptly. Students welcome the increased opportunities to hold positions of responsibility, for instance as prefects, and enjoy being part of the mixed-age learning family groups.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching in the main school and the sixth form is satisfactory overall but there are wide variations in quality both between and within subjects. It is not good enough to accelerate students' progress sufficiently to enable them to overcome underachievement arising from previous poor learning experiences. Where teaching is stronger, teachers' thorough subject knowledge and good grasp of the assessment criteria for qualifications, contribute well to the incremental structuring of learning. Teachers convey their high expectations to students and manage learning and

behaviour well. Lessons move at a brisk pace with a variety of activities that help to sustain momentum and students' interest. The development of literacy skills through, for instance, modelling technical vocabulary, is integral. Excellent practice in fostering oracy was noted in one lesson where Year 12 students developed their understanding of the Wall Street crash through an intense discussion. A variety of techniques which support the assessment of small steps in learning, including peer marking, are developing indicating that the academy's professional development in this area is bearing fruit.

Where teaching is weaker time is not used well, activities are mundane and often completed by the whole class regardless of students' individual needs. Planning, and the structure of tasks, do not provide opportunities for students to take responsibility for their learning. Questioning does not probe students' understanding deeply enough or unearth misconceptions. Occasionally, behaviour is not managed well enough for all students to learn.

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory: the academy has staged plans to restructure it. Already there is an increased choice of suitable, accredited courses and qualifications at Key Stage 4, promoting students' inclusion in learning. More flexibility in the period over which courses are taught, alongside early entries to examinations, are extending students' opportunities to succeed. Students taking examinations are well supported through, for instance, many revision sessions and mentoring. Aspects of the curriculum are carefully targeted at the needs of specific groups of students, for example the extensive support for students with weak literacy skills. Enrichment of the curriculum is developing well with a growing use of visits and visitors to support courses such as health and social care. Opportunities for students to train to deliver aspects of the 'humantopia' experience to their peers are contributing well to the development of their self-confidence and leadership skills. There is a broadening range of extra-curricular activities such as samba band, street dance and sports teams. Students highlight these opportunities as one of the best features of the academy.

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory and having a positive impact on students' attitudes, sense of security, behaviour and attendance. The academy has clarified protocols and roles so that responsibilities for monitoring students' welfare and achievement are clearly placed. There is an increasing emphasis on working with families to promote students' well-being and the academy is building its internal capacity for this, for example, through the appointment of a parental involvement worker. There is an extensive transition programme for Year 6 pupils, a considerable proportion of which is led by academy students. This has proved successful in smoothing the move into Year 7. The vertical arrangement of students in houses and learning family groups is promoting a sense of belonging.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

Leaders and managers have been successful in establishing a distinctive character for the academy through arrangements such as the learning family groups, the house system and the health aspect of the specialism. Appropriately, through this early period of operation, the focus has been on carefully building the capacity of senior leaders and managers through new appointments, the shared development of the academy's vision and the introduction of suitable systems to deliver this. As part of the next stage, leadership at middle level is being developed and responsibilities devolved. Line management systems ensure that middle leaders are both supported and challenged regularly. They are involved in detailed reviews of departments and the capacity to evaluate provision is growing. This is supported effectively by the partner academy through shared quality assurance procedures and the establishment of a common data management system. In the main, the academy has a realistic view of its progress and has identified its priorities for development accurately. Suitable planning is in place to address these and regular reviews check that progress is on track.

Improving the quality of teaching and learning is the central plank of the academy's work this year. The newly formed teaching and learning group bring considerable expertise to the task. Senior leaders have an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses and from this have devised a programme of professional development that is both tailored to the needs of the academy and those of individual staff. The good practice in the academy is beginning to be shared. The positive impact of these measures was evident in some of the better lessons observed.

Governance is good and well led. The governing body provides clear strategic direction for the academy in the context of the partnership. Overall, the academy's capacity to improve is satisfactory: a firm base for further improvement has been established. Attainment and attendance are rising and students make satisfactory progress. Behaviour has improved and the climate for learning is positive.

External support

The partnership provides clear strategic direction for the academy as well as good support. Close joint working at the most senior level is gradually being extended so that liaison on individual subjects is developing. The academy benefits from the expertise of its partner ranging across shared data systems, ICT support, common financial processes and building maintenance.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase students' achievement by raising attainment.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that students make more rapid progress by:
 - identifying accurately deficits in students' learning and better matching work to their needs
 - developing students' independent learning skills
 - sharing the best practice that exists in the academy.
- Raise the rate of attendance and reduce the level of persistent absence so that they are at least in line with the national averages.

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

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector