

8 March 2011

Mrs J Bridges
Principal
Castle View Enterprise Academy
Cartwright Road
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR5 3DX

Dear Mrs Bridges,

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Castle View Enterprise Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Andrew Johnson HMI to your academy on 9 and 10 March 2011, 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 the first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, and other nominated members of staff, and the Chair of the Governing Body, who also represented the sponsors.

Context

Castle View Enterprise Academy opened in September 2009, replacing one secondary school. There are 789 students on roll, which makes the academy smaller than the average sized secondary school. Almost all students are of White British heritage, with marginally fewer girls than boys. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is almost twice the national average. The number of students identified by the academy as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average although, of these, the number with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The academy, which has specialist status for business and enterprise, serves an area where there has been a background of low attainment and low transition into post-16 education, employment or training.

The academy staff comprises a number who moved from the predecessor school, alongside some new appointees, including at senior and middle management levels. Early difficulties in recruiting teachers in English and mathematics have been overcome, although the academy

has experienced higher than average levels of staff absence since opening. However, although there are two members of staff currently on long-term absence due to ill health, the overall teacher absence rate has improved since the start of this academic year.

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

The academy has made good progress in raising attainment in English and mathematics. In 2010, 43% of students gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics; this compares with 26% in the final year of the predecessor school. Although this represents a significant improvement, senior managers and leaders recognised that it fell short of the national average of 54% and that further improvements are needed. Evidence provided during this monitoring inspection confirms that an increasing proportion of students are now on track to improve upon the 2010 results, especially in gaining A* to C grades in English and mathematics. Also, there is now a more positive picture of attainment in the vast majority of other subjects. The students made good progress last year, relative to their starting points, although it was much slower in English than in mathematics. Eighty-six per cent of students gained five or more GCSE grades A* to C last year, which was 11% above the national average. This year's academy tracking data indicate a more consistent picture of progress, especially in English and mathematics. In lessons observed, the students made satisfactory and sometimes better progress in developing skills, knowledge and understanding across a range of subjects. The overwhelming majority of students enjoy their learning, gaining much from the greater variety of accreditation on offer. The academy met its subject specialist target in business and enterprise in 2010, and has had a significant impact on raising overall attainment.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

In recent surveys carried out by the academy, a large majority of students say that they feel safe; a fact also confirmed by parents and carers. The students' behaviour during the monitoring inspection was good, and most often exemplified by good levels of attention in lessons, positive attitudes to learning, good listening skills, and a genuine willingness to engage positively in individual, pair, group or whole-class activities. The attendance rate continues to improve, with a corresponding decrease in the number of persistent absentees. The latest full-year attendance data show that the academy is achieving above the national average for secondary schools.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching and assessment are improving rapidly due to robust monitoring and evaluation by senior and middle managers. As a result, staff know accurately how effective their teaching is and where future improvements can be made as an aid to raising standards. The most effective teaching is characterised by good use of lesson time to ensure that the pace of learning matches well against the students' known capabilities. In these lessons, work provides for the learning of new knowledge and the consolidation of deeper levels of understanding. Also, teachers skilfully use praise and feedback to motivate and

interest the students and foster positive working relationships. Although teachers' subject knowledge is very secure and used well in lessons, some over-direction of the content and pace of learning limits the potential for students of all abilities to show greater independence and personal decision-making in some aspects of their work. Questioning is used effectively to introduce the students to new learning or to reinforce prior learning, but almost all is of a 'closed style', where only one answer is sought. This, therefore, limits the greater variation in students' responses that some teachers seek in their lessons. The teachers' assessment of students' performance is developing very well, with the regular collection and use of data to assess ongoing progress against identified end-of-year targets. The quality of teachers' marking is ensuring that the students are becoming better informed about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. Lesson planning seen during the inspection was satisfactory, but too often focused on what will be taught and too little on the learning outcomes expected. A range of student information recorded on lesson plans is not used to inform the content taught. For example, the identification and number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, or those identified as gifted and/or talented.

The curriculum has been broadened, particularly at Key Stage 4 where there is now a greater range of accredited courses available to all students. The focused curricular provision for those students identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities is making a positive contribution to their improving attitudes to learning, and their levels of attainment and progress.

The academy is making effective progress in developing better systems to accurately assess and support all students' needs. Initial standardised tests carried out at the beginning of Year 7 indicate that a higher than expected proportion of students starting at the academy have some difficulties with a range of basic literacy and numeracy skills. Historically, the proportion of students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities has been high, but a more accurate and wide-ranging assessment has been introduced and numbers on the formal special educational needs register have been reducing since September 2010.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

Senior leaders and managers, including the governing body, share a common and very clear ambition to raise standards through improved provision, especially through a greater consistency of good or better quality teaching. The academy's planning is thorough and well directed on the key priorities and actions that will address identified weaknesses, while also focusing on improving student outcomes; this applies, in particular, to raising levels of attainment for all groups of students. As a result, academy self-evaluation is accurate and reflects the good capacity to improve further. The monitoring and challenge of teaching and learning is robust. This means that senior leaders are well positioned to refocus the academy's priorities on those aspects of teaching and learning that will have the greatest impact on raising students' levels of attainment and improving their rate of progress. Middle management has undergone changes since the academy opened, and recent appointments

in key subject areas are helping to maintain the pace of change and are positive additions to improving management capacity at this level. Regular and well focused staff training is also helping to develop staff expertise and confidence in a number of areas, while also generating a coherence and consensus approach to school improvement matters. Safeguarding procedures are clear and well adhered to by all adults who work in the academy. The academy's single central register meets all requirements.

The governance of the academy is progressing at a pace because effective strategies are developing to ensure there are high levels of accountability expected from senior leaders and managers. The governing body is well informed about aspects of the academy's progress and where further actions are needed to continue improvements in key areas of the academy's work. Allocation of the governors' responsibilities is aligned well to the range of experiences and expertise that individual members bring to the governance of the academy.

External support

The overall quality of external support is good. There are well established links with a number of local external partners, primarily to support the development of its business and enterprise specialism, and to help assess the quality and identify further improvements in all subject areas. When combined with the School Improvement Partner reports, the academy is well placed to accurately assess its current quality of provision and areas for future development.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to improve the students' rate of progress and thus their levels of attainment by:
 - helping them to meet or exceed their personal targets
 - helping them to achieve or exceed their known capabilities.
- Continue to improve the quality of teaching so that, overall, it reaches at least a consistently good standard by:
 - planning lessons to take greater account of the students' prior learning
 - identifying, more clearly, the intended student outcomes from the range of activities taught.
- Ensure the curriculum, guidance and support offered to students consistently matches their needs and aptitudes by:
 - monitoring reading comprehension levels throughout the academy

- continuing to review the criteria used to identify those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities to ensure they are accurate.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education and 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

Brian Blake
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc Chair of the Governing Body
The Academies Group, DfE [Paul.hann@education.gsi.gov.uk]