

17 June 2011

Mr M Westerdale
Principal
Parkwood Academy
Penrith Road
Sheffield
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Dear Mr Westerdale

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Parkwood Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with John Peckham HMI to your academy on 15 and 16 June 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 a first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, other nominated staff, two groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the sponsor and the academy's improvement partner.

Context

The academy opened on the site of its predecessor school in September 2009 and serves a diverse community in north-east Sheffield. It is sponsored by E-ACT and has subject specialisms in modern foreign languages and sport. The academy is smaller than the average sized secondary school, but has experienced an increase in student numbers since September 2010. There are currently 698 students on roll and projected numbers for students joining the academy in Year 7 indicate that there will be a further increase in September 2011. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is high. At 49.3%, the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is twice the national average. The groups most represented include those of Black or Black British African and Pakistani origin. Thirty eight percent of students speak English as an additional language. Student mobility is above average and the academy has experienced an increase in the number of students who are newly arrived in the country, in particular those of Romany Slovakian origin. Over half of all students have been identified as having special

educational needs and/or disabilities, although the proportion with a statement to support their specific learning needs is lower than the national average.

A new Principal and vice-principal took up post in September 2010. A new Chair of the Governing Body was appointed at the same time. Since then, the senior leadership team has been restructured, resulting in some changes to key roles. Most staff from the predecessor school transferred to the academy when it opened. During the last year, the academy has experienced higher than average levels of staff absence, which have resulted in some disruption to provision, particularly in mathematics. Executive leadership of English and mathematics is currently provided by two vice-principals. The academy has been successful in recruiting suitably qualified teachers to fill vacancies arising from a number of resignations and is almost fully staffed for September 2011. New accommodation for the academy is currently on schedule to be completed by spring 2012.

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

Students' attainment on entry to the academy is low overall. In 2010, the proportion of Year 11 students gaining five GCSE passes at A* to C, including English and mathematics, was below the minimum levels expected for their age. The percentage who gained five passes at A* to G was also below the national average. Students' performance varied widely between subjects. Progress in English was significantly below expected levels and while published data indicate that students made broadly satisfactory progress in mathematics. This was due to a heavy reliance on targeted intervention to close gaps in prior learning. More positively, students' performance in physical education (PE) was higher than the national average and more than half of students gained a qualification in a modern foreign languages course.

Current assessment information suggests that attainment by the end of Year 11 is beginning to rise due to a systematic approach to closing gaps in prior learning. Results from early exam entries in English and mathematics indicate that outcomes for Year 11 students sitting examinations this summer will exceed the minimum targets set by the government. Progress in other years is more variable and reflects the quality of teaching. During the inspection, learning proceeded at a brisk pace where imaginative activities engaged all students fully and challenged them to aim high. In particular, resources were adapted well to enable students who are new to English to participate fully. The pace of learning was less consistent where opportunities were missed for students to develop their own ideas or to reflect or consolidate what they know or can do. Occasionally, progress slowed because activities did not match students' varied needs.

Since September 2010, increased levels of accountability across the academy ensure that progress is tracked more rigorously towards long-term success criteria. Academy leaders have established a robust system to set challenging targets and track students' progress over time, taking into account those who join the academy at times other than the start of the academic year.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

A positive learning environment has been established and students' aspirations are rising as a result of the strong academy focus on raising attainment. Good opportunities are provided for students to take responsibility as members of the student council, peer mentors and sports leaders. In lessons, students are generally good natured and show interest in their learning. High levels of supervision ensure that behaviour is orderly on busy corridors around the academy. Changes to the academy's behaviour management systems in January 2011 have been well received by students and staff because expectations are clearly communicated and simple to follow. Resulting improvements in behaviour are reflected in the sharp fall in numbers of referrals for poor behaviour and fixed-term exclusions over the last year. Students report that behaviour has improved and that there are fewer instances when their learning is disrupted by others. However, some inappropriate behaviour persists, including low-level chatter that is not consistently challenged by teachers.

Attendance has improved significantly from low levels since September and is currently around 92 %. This is as a result of well-coordinated strategies that include: raising the profile of regular attendance through the academy's reward system; rigorous monitoring of attendance; and engagement with families, for example, through the Somali Study Support Consortium and the appointment of a native speaker to work with Slovakian families.

The effectiveness of provision

Lesson observations during the inspection matched those undertaken by academy leaders which indicate an improving picture in teaching quality across the academy. Almost all teaching seen was satisfactory and over half was good or better, including two examples of outstanding practice. Where teaching is most effective, expectations are high. Students of all abilities are supported and challenged well so their progress is rapid. These lessons are characterised by high levels of participation and enjoyment of learning because teachers build on students' prior learning effectively through a wide variety of practical activities. Good attention is paid to developing students' literacy skills and to increase their confidence in expressing ideas, particularly through group work. Time is allocated for students to reflect on what they have learnt and apply their skills to new situations. However, this practice is not consistent across the academy. The desire for pace in lessons is sometimes at the expense of clarity or understanding and opportunities are missed for students to consolidate or reflect on what they have learnt. Opportunities are also missed to transfer basic skills and knowledge between subjects to maximise learning outcomes. Agreed procedures for managing behaviour are not always used consistently with the result that teaching is interrupted by low-level disruption. The quality of marking is variable; it is usually regular, but not always as productive as it might be in guiding students to their next steps in learning.

An ongoing programme of continuing professional development is proving effective in developing teachers' skills to respond to the broad range of students' learning needs, including those who are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language.

The academy is also developing its own first language testing programme as a response to an increasing number of students who are new to English in order that provision can be tailored appropriately. Teachers of specialist subjects make a positive contribution to improving the quality of provision by sharing best practice to expand the range of teachers' skills in other subject areas, for example, mathematics.

Since September 2010, academy leaders have recognised that the current curriculum no longer matches students' needs as effectively as it might. Consequently, a new programme is in the advanced stages of preparation, to be implemented from September 2011. Plans indicate that greater emphasis will be placed on developing specialist subject knowledge and skills from Year 7 onwards and providing greater flexibility for students embarking on Key Stage 4 courses. The academy is also developing off-site provision with partner providers to increase the range of vocational programmes available.

Well-established systems ensure that students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are supported well. Progress meetings with tutors are well received by students and have a positive impact on raising aspirations for the future.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

A period of intensive activity, to tackle urgent priorities, means that the academy is on track to fulfil the aims set out in the Principal's vision statement and associated improvement plan. The Principal has generated a strong focus on raising attainment with the aim that all students benefit from a relevant programme that unlocks their potential and enables them to achieve their best. He has led and managed the academy effectively through a period of significant change. Senior leaders have adapted well to their new roles that reflect their strengths. The capacity of this group to drive improvement has been strengthened as a result of these changes and leaders are focused well on key priorities. Strong leadership provided by the vice-principals, who are currently responsible for English and mathematics, means that weaknesses in provision have been tackled rigorously and effectively.

The quality of middle leadership is improving. Leaders are developing the skills to monitor and evaluate the performance in their area of responsibility more effectively. They value the challenge and support they have received from senior leaders and are more confident to hold individual teachers to account.

Staff are generally very positive about the changes over the last year and the great majority have responded well to the clear expectations communicated by leaders. They express confidence in the academy's secure systems to help track students' progress and improve the quality of provision. Opportunities to experiment with new teaching methods have reinvigorated staff and provided opportunities for some to develop new strategies that are being shared within the academy and to wider audiences.

The rapid pace of change since September 2010 has been informed by accurate self-evaluation led by the Principal and the vice-principals that is reflective, challenging and

rooted in reliable data. The governing body provides increasing levels of support and challenge. The Chair of the Governing Body has a good knowledge of the academy's strengths and weaknesses and governors are highly committed to the roles they play in holding academy leaders to account for students' performance. Although leaders recognise that some inconsistencies remain in the implementation of agreed procedures, firm foundations have been established on which to build and the academy is well placed to improve further.

External support

A wide range of external consultant support has been tailored effectively by academy leaders to meet priorities identified in the academy improvement plan, particularly in improving the quality of teaching. Visits by the academy's improvement partner have provided helpful opportunities for the Principal to reflect on progress made during the year. The network of E-ACT academies also acts as a source of support as well as enabling lead teachers to share good practice. The representative of the academy's sponsor provides good levels of challenge and support through a regular and rigorous monitoring process that is focused sharply on students' outcomes.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise attainment in English and mathematics.
- Embed agreed procedures to drive improvement and ensure consistency in their application across the academy.
- Ensure that the skills and knowledge that students develop in lessons are transferrable between subjects to maximise their impact on learning.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, 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,

Sara Morrissey
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc

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