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Mr Hornsby
Principal
Skegness Academy
Burgh Road
Skegness
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Dear Mr Hornsby

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Skegness Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Paul Brooker HMI to your academy on 28–29 September 2011, 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, groups of students, staff and representatives from the Skegness Academy Council, who are responsible for governance.

Context

The Skegness Academy opened in September 2010. The academy is sponsored by The Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust. A new Principal was appointed in 2010 to lead the academy. Nearly all staff from the predecessor school continue to work in the academy. There are twenty staff that are being trained as part of the graduate teacher or academy instructor programmes. The academy does not have a specialism.

The academy is larger than the average secondary school with 1033 students on roll. The sixth form has doubled in size over the last year and currently there are 188 students on roll. The proportions of students from minority ethnic groups and those

who speak English as an additional language are below average. A slightly higher than average proportion of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than average, as is the proportion who leave or are admitted partway through their secondary school education. Education in Skegness is selective. Nearly all the students that attend the academy were not selected for the local grammar schools.

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

Assessment information shows that the attainment on entry of students is well below average and declining. However, over the last year nearly all groups of students have made very rapid progress in most subjects. Consequently, attainment is rising very strongly. For example, all the students who left Year 11 in 2011 gained five GCSEs graded C or above. The academy has set very challenging targets for English and mathematics. GCSE results for English and mathematics this year show that the gap between the academy's results and the national average is being narrowed considerably. Assessment information for the current Year 11 students indicates that for the first time, students are well placed to attain average standards in English and mathematics. Attainment in vocational courses in the sixth form has risen considerably. The academy introduced a range of AS-level courses for the first time in September 2010. In some of these, in particular the science subjects, students did not make the expected progress and attainment was lower than it could have been.

The students' enjoyment of learning is evident in all lessons. They engage enthusiastically with their work, which is well pitched and challenging. For example, in an outstanding English lesson, Year 11 students relished the challenge of scanning and retrieving key pieces of information to illustrate that the texts read described alternative realities. The teacher then challenged them extremely effectively to justify their answers.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The academy's successful drive to raise standards has been underpinned by the very impressive transformation in students' attitudes and behaviour. The Principal has successfully instilled extremely high expectations of behaviour, including students' appearance, politeness and compliance. The students recognise the benefits that this greatly improved ethos has brought. They demonstrate a mature level of self-discipline and are proud to be a part of the academy. Consequently, the exclusion rate has reduced dramatically. During the visit, behaviour was good or outstanding in nearly all lessons and around the academy. The students' far greater engagement and enjoyment of school are reflected in their much improved attendance, which has increased very rapidly from below the national average in 2010 to above average in the academy's first year. Attendance in the sixth form is impressively high. The

relentless focus on reducing absence has more than halved levels of persistent absenteeism.

The effectiveness of provision

Very high expectations of teaching have been made explicit by school leaders and staff have responded extremely well. Teaching in the very large majority of lessons is good or better. These lessons are characterised by clear learning objectives and expectations. Work is challenging and teachers ensure that lessons are interesting and engaging. One impressive feature is the consistently high standard of teaching of the significant minority of trainee teachers or those in their first year of teaching. School records show that the proportion of lessons where teaching is satisfactory has reduced considerably over the year. Where teaching does remain satisfactory, assessment information is used less effectively to ensure that all groups of pupils are challenged sufficiently and a few make less progress than their peers.

The curriculum has broadened considerably over the last year. There are now much greater opportunities for students of all abilities. One major success has been the growth in the sixth form. Sixth-form provision is developing well and nearly all students speak positively about the new opportunities on offer. However, aspects of support and guidance are weaker for students on AS-level courses. Targets set for these students and the tracking of their progress are not effective enough to ensure that they make good progress.

The academy's stance on attendance is unequivocal and has led to significant improvements across all groups of students, including those whose circumstances make them most vulnerable. The provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities has strengthened considerably. Not only are students well supported, but the academy also has high expectations of what they can achieve. One consequence of this is the impressive rise in the number of GCSE qualifications these students gain. Procedures for child protection and the care, guidance and support of vulnerable students are highly effective. For example, the 'Changing attitudes and behaviours group' has been very effective in safeguarding students whose circumstances and behaviour made them particularly vulnerable.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The academy's rapid progress in its first year has been achieved by developing leadership capability at all levels. The immediate impact of this work and the way that high expectations and effective systems have been embedded demonstrate that the academy has great capacity to sustain the drive to raise standards. The inspirational leadership of the Principal has completely transformed the attitudes of staff, students, parents and carers and the community to the work of the academy. One impressive feature of the leadership of the academy is the way that efforts have been concentrated on retaining and developing the practice of existing staff. This has been a highly successful strategy. Morale throughout the academy community is

now extremely high. Expectations among staff of what they and the students can achieve are equally high. The Principal is well supported by a dedicated team of school leaders who appreciate the increased opportunities to demonstrate the effectiveness of their leadership skills.

Extremely robust and rigorous procedures for checking the work of the academy by school leaders, supported by Greenwood Dale Foundation, have resulted in the very impressive improvements to outcomes and provision this year. Current development plans effectively support this very rapid improvement in the quality of education for all students. The academy council demonstrates that it has a clear vision for the future of the academy. It effectively supports and holds the Principal to account for the strategic development of the academy.

External support

Greenwood Dale Foundation has expertly supported and challenged the Principal in fostering the major changes in the ethos of the academy that underpin the outstanding progress that has been made. Academy leaders also appreciate the effective work of the School Improvement Partner, who shares the approach of the trust. The support of the local authority partner agency has been highly effective in developing the teaching skills of the significant minority of trainee and newly qualified teachers.

Main Judgements

The academy has made outstanding progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that sixth form students on AS-level courses receive better quality support and guidance to enable them to make more rapid progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Bristow
Her Majesty's Inspector