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Mrs Kathy Leaver
Principal
The Co-operative Academy of Manchester
Plant Hill Road
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Manchester
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Dear Mrs Leaver

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of The Co-operative Academy of Manchester

Introduction

Following my visit with Jane Austin HMI to your academy on 20-21 March 2012, 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, observed teaching and learning in 21 lessons and a tutorial session, scrutinised documents including the school's self evaluation and improvement planning, and met with the Principal, senior leaders, groups of students and two members of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body. These governors represented the academy's main sponsor. A telephone discussion was held with an educational consultant who has monitored the academy during its development.

Context

The academy opened in September 2010, in a new building on the site of the predecessor school. The sponsors are The Co-operative Group, Manchester City Council and The Manchester College. The academy's specialism is finance and business. A small sixth form has been developed, offering various courses at levels 1-3 that complement those offered in other local sixth forms.

The academy is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school, with 517 students on roll, including 18 in the sixth form. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is around three times that found nationally. Around one in five students are from minority ethnic groups, most of whom speak English as an additional language. Around 20% of students are identified as having special educational needs; this proportion is much higher than found nationally. Around half of these students have behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is higher than found nationally. The academy has a stable student population. There has been some staff turnover but the academy has been successful in filling vacancies with permanent staff. A higher number of students are joining the academy in September 2012, enabling the academy to appoint additional staff.

The academy has recently been accredited with the Food for Life Partnership Award and the Green Flag Award, both at bronze level.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

Students join the academy with low attainment, particularly in literacy. National test results secured by the academy in 2011 showed an improvement on the performance of the predecessor school. Around three-quarters of students attained five good GCSE qualifications, in line with the national figure. Achievement was particularly strong in religious education, science, art and information communication technology. Forty four per cent of students attained at least five good GCSE qualifications, including English and mathematics. The academy's performance comfortably exceeded the government's current floor standard, although attainment remained significantly below the national average. The proportions of students making expected progress in English and mathematics were below average. A range of strategies has been introduced to accelerate students' progress and raise their attainment. Improved teaching and focused intervention mean that more students are now reaching ambitious personal targets. The academy's robust tracking information indicates that its trajectory of improvement will continue at a sharper rate than is found nationally. Achievement of students known to be eligible for free school meals continues to be below that of their peers, but this gap is closing. There is no significant difference in the performance of students of different ethnic backgrounds.

Progress observed by inspectors during lessons was at least satisfactory and often good or better. When learning was strongest, students were thoroughly engaged by activities that built effectively on their understanding and enabled them to work collaboratively and independently. The progress of students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form is generally stronger than that made by younger students. Progress in mathematics is not as strong as in other subjects. There are weaknesses in students' use of standard English in their writing across the curriculum. Students' reading skills are generally better developed in response to concerted action by the academy to provide catch-up programmes and to focus explicitly on reading in a range of lessons. Significant progress has been made in the development of students' personal skills and attitudes to learning.

The quality of teaching

Teaching in the academy is satisfactory overall, with an increasing amount that is good and some practice that is outstanding. The academy's focus on co-operative values and personal responsibility is successfully fostering positive attitudes to learning. Relationships between teachers and students are generally good, characterised by high expectations and mutual respect. The academy has worked hard to ensure that lessons have a consistent style and format. Lesson planning has been standardised to ensure that teachers consider the needs of all students. Assessments are undertaken regularly and both teachers and students have an accurate view of individual achievement and the next steps to be taken to secure improvement. In the best lessons, learning proceeds at a stimulating pace, supported by interactive structures that maintain students' interest and enable different ways of working. Students' social skills are encouraged through strategies

that require them to work with different partners. Where progress is slower, students do not readily make connections between different aspects of their learning and sometimes lose focus. On occasions, lessons are overcrowded with activity that result in work being unfinished and learning insufficiently secured. Many teachers use effective and varied strategies for questioning students, but on some occasions, teachers' reliance on those students who volunteer answers reduces the engagement of other class members.

Teachers' marking is regular and informs students of the next steps they need to take to improve their work. Progress cards capture the achievement of each student, including through students' self-assessment. Teachers have accurate information about each student's attainment and needs. They know students well as individuals and consistently try to overcome any barriers to learning that individuals present. Support staff have clear roles and make an effective contribution to individuals' learning.

Teachers do not routinely insist upon high standards of presentation of students' written work. Consequently, some work is poorly presented or unfinished. There is no common expectation as to how students should respond to teachers' marking, particularly in relation to spelling, punctuation and sentence structure. Most teachers provide starter activities to engage students as soon as they arrive at lessons but it is not always clear how these relate to the main planned learning for each lesson.

The teaching observed by inspectors was generally better in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form than at Key Stage 3. This finding resonated with the academy's own evaluation of teaching.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Academy leaders have a relentless focus on embedding core values and associated behaviours that underpin the work of staff and students alike. Most students show respect for each other, for staff and for their business-like learning environment. Students confirm that the quality of behaviour has improved markedly since the opening of the academy and while there are occasions when lessons are disrupted, these are increasingly infrequent. Students state that bullying is rare and that they have confidence in the academy's procedures for tackling it. Records indicate that incidents of racist name-calling have diminished. Behaviour on corridors and in social spaces is generally calm and sensible. Students value the academy's behaviour management system and perceive that it rewards good behaviour fairly. They are involved in evaluating their own learning and in contributing their ideas as to how the academy can be further improved. Students willingly take responsibility, including as prefects, for ensuring that the academy is a safe and harmonious community. They appreciate the academy's pastoral system, including the support offered to them through the 'family' tutor groups in which they raise money for their chosen charities with enthusiasm.

Students' attendance has risen sharply from a very low baseline in the predecessor school and is now above the national level. Few students are persistently absent. This strong improvement is the result of better teaching, raised aspirations and assiduous monitoring. The vast majority of students take responsibility for arriving punctually to lessons. Fewer students are excluded from the academy as behaviour management is strengthened.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The Principal and senior leaders, in partnership with sponsors and the governing body, have established a clear sense of identity and ethos that is understood and respected by most students and their families. This is evident in the raised self-esteem of students and the abundant evidence of co-operative values and behaviours. Leaders are clear about the conditions for effective, purposeful learning and are rigorous in monitoring the work of the academy. Quality assurance processes are strong and have been moderated by an educational consultant. Students testify to the effectiveness of the academy in improving their learning and life chances. As one stated, 'The Principal has a strategy and every action she takes is the result of a lot of thought.' Middle leaders are increasingly effective and are benefiting from professional development opportunities provided by the sponsors. Personalised opportunities for continuing professional development mean that individuals' strengths and skills can be developed and good practice can be shared. The leadership of teaching has been effective in establishing consistency of routines and raising expectations of what students can achieve.

The academy offers a broad and balanced curriculum that is increasingly tailored to meet students' needs. Core lessons within the school day are complemented by wide-ranging additional learning opportunities before and after school that enable targeted support, enrichment and extension work. The introduction of a one-year GCSE history course has been welcomed by higher attaining students who willingly attend early morning sessions to further their learning. Work experience and vocational learning are effectively supported by the academy's sponsors so that students' skills for future employability are fostered. The extra-curricular programme is vibrant, including a range of sporting, musical and creative opportunities that are complemented by new initiatives such as a successful debating society.

The academy is increasingly-outward facing. Its proactive involvement in networks and partnerships testifies to its confidence. The academy makes a positive contribution to the local community, including through a variety of events that are enjoyed by parents, carers and the academy's neighbours. The academy's self-evaluation is rigorous, honest and comprehensive; its capacity to maintain improvement is good.

External support

The academy's sponsors have provided imaginative and effective support, including through the provision of business coaching for the academy's leaders and

apprenticeship opportunities for students. Opportunities for the Principal to work in partnership with leaders of the other Co-operative Academies have led to the fruitful sharing of practice. Through an educational consultant, the Young People's Learning Agency provides a high level of challenge to the academy. Monitoring reports clearly evaluate the academy's performance and validate its improvement agenda.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Accelerate progress and raise attainment in mathematics.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good or outstanding by sharing and building on the most effective practice that exists in the academy.
- Improve the presentation and accuracy of students' writing, particularly with regard to spelling, punctuation and sentence structure.
- Ensure that students act upon the feedback given to them by their teachers in order to improve their work.

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

Yours sincerely

Mrs Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector