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Mrs R de Souza
Principal
Ormiston Victory Academy
Middleton Crescent
Costessey
Norwich
NR5 0PX

Dear Mrs de Souza

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Ormiston Victory Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Paul Brooker, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 23–24 May 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, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal and other senior leaders, groups of students and staff, and members of the governing body. They spoke with the Director of the Ormiston Trust and representatives of various organisations that work with the academy. Inspectors observed an assembly and 24 lessons, each taken by a different member of staff. They also made seven shorter visits to check the effectiveness of learning support and tutor periods.

Context

Ormiston Victory Academy opened in September 2010 following the closure of its predecessor, Costessey High School. The students and the majority of the staff from the predecessor school transferred to the academy. The academy also appointed new members of staff, including 16 newly qualified teachers. During the first few months, staffing issues led to the departure of six of the transferred staff. Later, the

Vice Principal was seconded as Principal Designate to another of the sponsor's academies, an appointment that is now permanent. These changes gave the academy the opportunity to establish a new senior leadership structure with all but one of the team being drawn from the predecessor school's middle management.

The academy is a little smaller than the average secondary school, with a growing proportion of students in the sixth form. It has dual specialisms in science and applied learning. Most students are White British and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. At the time of transfer from the predecessor school, the proportion of disabled students and those identified as having special educational needs was well above the national average. Following a comprehensive review, the proportion is now well below the national average.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

The academy's first examination results in 2011 showed a remarkable increase compared to the predecessor school. The proportion of students gaining five higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, rose from 38% to 64%. In the sixth form, attainment was above average in vocational qualifications, but below average in AS and A level examinations. The academy acknowledges that the first year's improvement was helped by a high level of intervention, including extra support and intensive revision programmes. However, higher achievement is now being sustained by better teaching in the classroom and the improved curriculum.

Critically, learning and progress have improved considerably in all year groups and particularly for students known to be entitled to free school meals. On average, students in Years 7 and 8 were two terms behind when they joined the academy. They have caught up rapidly in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, attainment in these year groups is now above average. Standards are also rising year on year for older students. Sixth form achievement is improving rapidly, particularly in mathematics and the specialist area of science.

Students' learning and progress are now good or better in a large majority of lessons. In the best lessons observed, students often asked penetrating questions of their own because their teachers had, over time, helped them to develop inquisitiveness and a desire for knowledge. For example, Year 10 science students raised highly pertinent questions about atomic nuclei. On vocational courses, the genuine work-related focus enables students to learn rapidly. In an outstanding beauty therapy lesson, students developed their customer service and practical skills equally strongly as they practised massage and skin treatments.

The quality of teaching

Strong leadership from senior and subject leaders has transformed the quality of teaching. Students' progress is assessed regularly and kept under constant review.

Teachers plan consistently well, guided by carefully designed schemes of work and by the academy's lesson template with its four phases of learning: engage, explore, challenge and apply, and review. As a result, students are quickly engaged in purposeful activity. The most effective teachers use assessment information well to provide alternative activities and resources to suit the needs of different groups, including disabled students and those with special educational needs, those lacking in confidence and any underachieving students. Teaching assistants provide appropriate in-class support for targeted students, but are not often asked to lead the teaching for a small group to address a specific weakness.

The quality of teaching seen during the inspection confirmed the academy's own view that most lessons are taught well, leading to good learning and progress with much that is outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers used questioning exceptionally well to explore students' reasoning and to help them to articulate their ideas. Engaging activities helped to motivate students and deepen their understanding, as in an outstanding Year 8 lesson on the 1984 miners' strike, where a scripted role-play was used to bring home the high emotions of the period. Teaching contributes well to students' creativity and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, A level biology students discussed the ethics of stem-cell research and Year 8 art students made face-masks based on African and Mayan designs.

In a few of the lessons observed, the pace of learning was slower because assessment was not used as well to support learning. Some teachers did not adapt their teaching quickly enough when it became apparent that students were confused. The school's marking policy is not consistently well applied: some 'next steps' guidance is too vague and some teachers do not check whether it is followed.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

An affirmative culture based on high aspiration, praise and mutual support is nurtured in the academy's everyday work. Assemblies, tutor time and lessons promote positive attitudes and values, such as respect and appreciation. Supportive relationships are modelled by staff at every level. Students move between lessons calmly and with due consideration for one another. The academy is, consequently, a calm and orderly place to learn. Students' attitudes in lessons, which had previously hindered progress, now contribute strongly to learning. Students settle quickly and comply with teachers' high expectations about their behaviour and participation. They enjoy working together in pairs and groups, so that ideas are discussed, refined and carefully rehearsed. Students increasingly take responsibility for their own learning by undertaking self-review and peer-evaluation sensibly and constructively.

The rate of fixed-term exclusion has dropped to a third of the high level in the predecessor school. Referrals for unacceptable behaviour have declined, and fewer students need to be removed from lessons. Academy records also indicate a

significant decrease in bullying incidents. Students show consideration for the welfare of others and understand how to stay safe. They are alert to different types of bullying, and feel confident to report any incidents that occur. The positive participation of students is reflected in their attendance, which has improved from below average to above, with many fewer students being persistently absent.

Notwithstanding the remarkable improvements, from time to time a few students still struggle to conform to the academy's expectations on attendance, appearance or behaviour. Some also express concerns about verbal bullying. The academy is well aware of residual issues and is sensitive to the particular needs of students, and balances well its support and challenge for individual students and their families.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The Principal's inspirational leadership has transformed the academy. Her high aspirations and unequivocal expectations are implemented by ensuring that all staff pay close attention to every detail. She has quickly established a high quality team of senior leaders with complementary strengths and skills. The governing body has been influential in encouraging the school to develop a wide range of external partnerships and wider initiatives. For example, work with the Open Youth Trust led to Year 12 performing arts students providing the showpiece at a charity gala. The academy's science and health specialism has been promoted innovatively through its outstanding links with the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital Trust. For instance, biology and beauty therapy courses are enriched by contributions from medical experts as well as visits to state-of-the-art facilities. Links with local primary schools have also been strengthened.

Self-evaluation and performance management are robust and effective, supported by well-focused professional development for staff. The academy monitors rigorously every aspect of its provision and performance to inform development planning and secure continuous improvement. Key priorities are pinpointed so that changes can be implemented swiftly. For example, although last year's GCSE results were much improved, senior leaders quickly identified scope for further improvement. The impact of leaders' prompt action is evident in the increasing number of students on track for high grades and better performance in geography and design technology.

Students' academic achievements and personal development have benefited considerably from the strengthening of every element of provision, including care, support and guidance, the curriculum, teaching and administration. The academy's capacity to improve, which is amply demonstrated by the speed and scale of its own transformation, is also evident in the support it is now providing for other schools.

External support

The academy requires relatively little external support. It is able to draw on the resources, experience and expertise of the Ormiston Trust. The additional work

involved in planning the new building developments, for example, has been helpfully alleviated by specialist support from the Trustees.

Main Judgement

The academy has made outstanding progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Further increase the proportion of good or better teaching by ensuring that all teachers are skilled in providing students with specific guidance on how to improve their work, and in using assessment during lessons to know when to adapt their teaching.

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

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector