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Mr Alan Warboys
Principal
Rossington All Saints Academy
Bond Street
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Dear Mr Warboys

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Rossington All Saints Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Joan Hewitt, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 22 and 23 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 the first monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, senior and middle leaders. They met also with the Chief Executive of the School Partnership Trust (SPT) who sponsor the academy, the Chair of the Governing Body, a Senior Quality Assurance Adviser from SPT and groups of students.

Context

The academy opened in April 2011, and is located in a new building previously occupied by its predecessor school. It has a smaller than average number of students, although this is rising. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than usual. An above-average number of students are supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.

A very small number of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak English as an additional language. The academy maintains the specialist sports college status gained some years ago by its predecessor school and it has recently added a literacy specialism. The academy's awards include Sportsmark Gold, Artsmark Silver, Investors in People, Healthy Schools and the Doncaster Inclusion Mark. A third of the staff are new to the school this year and this includes a high proportion who are newly qualified teachers.

The previous Ofsted inspection was of the predecessor school in April 2009. The SPT commissioned a review of the academy's work four weeks before this monitoring inspection. The review was carried out by members of the SPT school improvement team working with independent inspectors using the Ofsted inspection framework.

Achievement of students at the academy

The most recent published data, academy records and lesson observations show that students' achievement is improving markedly in Key Stages 3 and 4. In particular, the percentage of students attaining five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, has increased significantly. The main reason for this is that stronger teaching enables an increasing number of students to make good progress in English and mathematics between Year 7 and Year 11. Furthermore, there is a rising trend of good progress in the younger age ranges, indicating that the improving standards are sustainable in the future.

Standards in the sixth form have improved substantially and are no longer a cause for concern as they were during the previous inspection of the predecessor school. This improvement is the result of better leadership and teaching along with a wider range of courses more closely matched to the needs and aspirations of the students. Because of the better provision there has been a significant increase in the number of students starting sixth form courses in Year 12 and many more of them are carrying on into Year 13.

Students in any year group whose progress is stalling are quickly identified and given support that helps them to catch up quickly. For example, academy leaders have assessed that many younger students have below-average literacy and numeracy skills so they provide additional teaching that helps them to close the gap quickly on the levels expected for their age. The extra teaching of reading is particularly successful because of the involvement of older students who have been trained as 'literacy leaders'. They give the younger students very effective one-to-one support in developing their skills in comprehension and in using letters and sounds. Other underachieving groups have also been identified, for example; those receiving 'school action plus' support for their special educational needs, those capable of achieving the very highest grades and those with lower ability in mathematics. As a result of well-planned additional support, all of these groups are accelerating their progress.

While this specifically planned support is effective, less-able and more-able groups are not making enough progress in a small minority of lessons where learning activities are not sufficiently adapted to meet their needs.

Students' positive attitudes to work make a strong contribution to their improving achievement. Most enjoy learning and try their hardest. They work well when collaborating with partners and stay on-task when not directly supervised by an adult. They learn effectively through discussion and this is helping them to make good progress in developing their speaking skills. Some do not volunteer to answer questions that are thrown open to the class, although, when specifically asked, they can make a good attempt at a response. Most adopt a responsible approach to assessing their own work and that of others, which helps them to consolidate their understanding of new ideas.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved significantly and this is largely due to the systematic provision of training for teachers, carefully matched to their professional development needs. The large group of newly qualified teachers are very well supported and this has enabled most of them, quickly, to adopt the same successful methods as their more experienced colleagues.

Students make better progress in the growing number of lessons where teaching is lively and stimulating. Teachers create an effective climate for learning in which, for example, students take a lead in discussing interesting topics such as the pros and cons of using oil as a fuel. Furthermore, they can independently access guidelines for vocabulary, spelling and grammar and it takes no more than a quiet word to get them back on track if they become distracted. The pace of learning is improving, especially in those classes where teachers continuously assess students' progress to decide the right time for increasing the level of challenge in their work. Students generally do not have to sit and listen for too long before they can extend their new learning with interesting independent activities.

Students told inspectors that they have seen expectations rise significantly over the past year and this is especially evident in their much more ambitious targets. At the same time, students say that teachers give them much support to meet their targets. The inspection evidence supports these views. The majority of teachers know the differing attainment levels of their students and they use this information well to modify lesson objectives for each ability group in their class. However, not all teachers are equally skilful in adapting learning activities to help each group to achieve their objective. Consequently, there are a few times when, for example, more-able students are coasting or less-able students are struggling. Effective planning was seen in physical education where a range of racquet-ball activities kept students of different abilities fully engaged in vigorous activity and the majority rapidly acquired new skills. Such planning is not seen consistently across the academy.

This weakness was identified in the recent SPT review, which also reported that mainstream lessons are not sufficiently adapted for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The academy leaders have made a quick and effective response to this; they have provided training for staff on how to prepare lessons suitable for a range of ability groups and all teachers have been given detailed guidance on how to alter their teaching for students with particular learning difficulties. While these measures are beginning to have a positive influence on the quality of teaching, it is too soon to see any significant impact on students' achievement.

As part of the academy's new specialism there is an increased focus on teaching literacy skills across the curriculum. A good example was seen in science where students are given specific and detailed guidance on how to extend their writing style, vocabulary and grammar when reporting a scientific investigation. 'Self, society and spirit' has a prominent place in the academy's curriculum and this makes a strong positive contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, for example when they reflect on how to prepare themselves for the society of the future and when they discuss how to maintain harmony between different groups in society.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour is improving and this is making a positive contribution to their better progress. There is a calm, orderly environment around the academy with social areas being pleasant places to gather and lessons rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. Students with significant behavioural, emotional and social difficulties are given effective support which enables them to avoid exclusion and minimise disruption to their learning. As a result, their academic progress is improving and the number of exclusions has greatly reduced.

Students' attendance has improved significantly over the last year because they enjoy school and can access courses more relevant to their interests. In addition, the academy's collection and analysis of attendance information has improved, enabling much more effective targeting of support and challenge to the students and families who most need it.

Students say they feel safe and comfortable in the academy. They know of a range of adults to whom they can take any concerns. Students learn about all forms of bullying and how to respond to it. They have a clear understanding of how to avoid the dangers of inappropriate use of computers and mobile phones. They do not feel significantly threatened by any form of bullying within the academy.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

Leadership and management are strong. The Principal and other leaders work very effectively together to achieve the sponsor group's goal for outstanding comprehensive education that gives all local youngsters an equal opportunity to achieve well and have high aspirations. Staff are fully committed to the same goal and do their best to meet the high standards for teaching and care set by their leaders. Requirements for safeguarding students are met.

Senior leaders have a robust method for continuously monitoring the quality of teaching and students' progress and it enables them to provide additional support or challenge where most necessary without delay. The success that this process has already realised in improving students' achievement demonstrates the academy's growing capacity to raise standards further. Members of the governing body are increasingly adding to this capacity, for example by learning about the academy's work through their partnership with senior leaders and seeking assurance that new measures are improving students' outcomes.

Leaders use their monitoring information effectively to set suitably ambitious targets for raising standards and for preparing a development plan showing how these targets will be met. This development plan accurately identifies the aspects of provision that need to be improved most, however, actions to raise the quality of teaching are sometimes not specific enough to ensure that there is as much emphasis on improving classroom practice as there is on providing additional support for underachieving students. Subject leaders make an increasingly strong contribution to the academy's improvement by leading the introduction of new methods in their departments and checking that these are having a positive impact on students' outcomes. Their cross-subject collaboration supports senior leaders in improving the consistency of effective practice across the academy.

Academy leaders are introducing significant improvements to the curriculum. In Key Stages 3 and 4, there is a better balance of academic and vocational subjects and, in the sixth form, the range of courses has been considerably extended through collaboration with other SPT academies in the area. One important outcome of these curriculum changes is that the percentage of 16- to 19-year-old leavers going into education, employment or training is above average and rising.

Curriculum specialisms are having a growing impact. The sports specialism provides a student 'leadership academy' which gives older students the skills to support teachers in their own academy and in local primary schools. While enriching the students' personal education, this work also produces teams of 'sports leaders' and 'literacy leaders' across a range of subject areas who help younger children to improve their achievement. The literacy specialism has only recently been introduced but it is already focusing teachers of all subjects on how they can contribute to improving students' reading and writing skills.

External support

The sponsor group contributes significantly to the academy's improvement through systematically monitoring the quality of provision and students' outcomes. At the same time it ensures that the academy has access to appropriate support closely matched to its needs. For example, the academy has made effective use of support from the sponsor group's own school improvement team and from other improvement agencies with which the sponsor group has formed links, such as advanced skill teachers and the Teaching School Alliance. An important driver for improvement is the effective working partnership with the sponsor group's other academies in the area. These partnerships contribute to: improved sixth form provision; opportunities for leaders to share practice with colleagues facing similar challenges in other academies and opportunities for newly qualified teachers to learn from effective practice in more than one setting.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Accelerate the raising of standards by ensuring that learning activities in lessons are better adapted to meet the needs of all groups of students.

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

John Rutherford
Her Majesty's Inspector