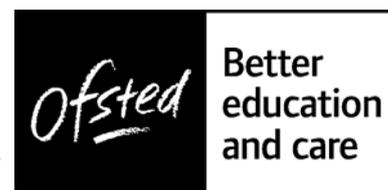


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13 October 2005

Sir Michael Wilshaw
Principal
Mossbourne Community Academy
100 Downs Park Road
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Dear Sir Michael

ACADEMIES INITIATIVE: MONITORING VISIT TO MOSSBOURNE COMMUNITY ACADEMY

Introduction

Following my visit with Robert Ellis HMI and Jacqueline White HMI to your academy on 5 and 6 October 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The first monitoring visit was in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, members of the senior leadership team, a group of pupils, the chair of the governing body and sponsor, two governors and a group of parents.

Context

The academy opened in September 2004 with Year 7 pupils and admitted its second year group at the start of the new academic year; there are currently 424 pupils on roll. Its increasing popularity has led to it being heavily over-subscribed. There will eventually be around 900 boys and girls on roll aged 11 to 16. Plans are presently being considered to provide a joint sixth form centre with a local school. It is a wide socially and culturally diverse community. Most of the pupils are of Black British Caribbean or African descent and White British, with just over one third coming from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. At 48%, the proportion of pupils who are entitled

to free school meals is well above average. Almost a quarter of the present intake has a special educational need, of which 5% hold a Statement of Special Educational Need. Inclusion is given a high priority and the academy has an agreement with the Learning Trust to make provision for a number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder.

Despite initial difficulties with recruitment, the academy used some good practices to appoint staff and, as a result, there is now a full and stable team of teachers. The principal has successfully organised a staffing structure to reflect the size and needs of the academy. Key appointments of senior and middle managers have been made. With just two year groups, staff have had to be flexible in their teaching, but appropriate steps have been taken to minimise difficulties. At the start of its first year, the academy was beset by challenging problems with the site, and was forced to use valuable resources to manage the development of the new building. Some of these problems have been overcome. The specialism of the academy is in information and communication technology (ICT). This has given it exceptionally good access to valuable state-of-the-art facilities and resources. ICT is used extensively in teaching and other administrative work. Plans are in place to extend its use in the curriculum.

Achievement and standards

The pupils' academic progress is good and often very good. Standards of attainment on entry vary each year but are below average overall, particularly in English in Year 7. Assessment records for the last academic year indicate that the Year 7 pupils made accelerated progress in English, mathematics and science. Gifted and talented pupils make very good progress and those with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress. Most pupils from minority ethnic groups and the small numbers learning English as an additional language make similar progress to their peers. The academy has very good systems in place to support pupils of Turkish, African and Caribbean descent who are at risk of under-achieving.

For the current Year 8, the work seen in lessons and exercise books showed good and often very good progress overall, so they are likely to meet the challenging but realistic targets. Pupils' progress was consistently satisfactory or better in all lessons. In the good or outstanding lessons, the pupils were motivated to work very hard by the brisk pace and use of a range of short timed activities that were linked to the precise learning objectives. Achievement in speaking and listening was mostly good and sometimes very good. Where pupils listened very well, and accepted advice, they made rapid progress. While effective teaching is helping to improve pupils' communication skills, there is scope for encouraging pupils to speak at length

and for developing discussion skills to promote independent learning. The development of study skills is an emerging strength of the academy. Well organised access to the ICT equipment as well as the structured extension classes and homework club provide pupils with opportunities to develop independent learning skills. Pupils displayed the ability to organise themselves sensibly during the break and lunch time without constant supervision when using the ICT resources. As a result, many of them are developing essential research and study skills.

- Progress is outstandingly good overall for a significant number of pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Provision for the pupils' personal development is good. Attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory or better in all lessons, including 15 that were at least good, five of which were outstanding. Pupils showed enjoyment towards learning and a desire to succeed. Their sense of community and understanding of other cultures is increased through religious education lessons, assemblies and opportunities for thinking about moral issues across the curriculum. Celebration of the multi-cultural make-up of the academy contributes well to the positive atmosphere.

Pupils are helped to take personal responsibility for achievement by being asked to reflect on the expectations for learning at the beginning of lessons. It was clear from pupils' attitudes that they like coming to school and are proud of their academy. At 95.8%, attendance for the last academic year has been good. Punctuality to school and lessons was good.

The recent parents' questionnaire reflects high levels of satisfaction. Parents are extremely positive about the academy: some highlighted the inclusive approach which underpins the academy's work and the teachers' consistent approach to high expectations for all pupils.

Rewards and praise were used well to help and motivate the pupils. Sanctions are used consistently to draw clear boundaries. There have been no permanent exclusions since the academy opened. The number of fixed term exclusions is monitored and is in keeping with the academy insisting on high standards of behaviour.

Pupils benefit from the wide range of extra-curricular and extension activities available to them. The high level of participation in activities is helping them to make good progress, develop their confidence and become well-rounded learners. Pupils get on well with each other. They feel safe and appreciated. They are well prepared for their wider role as young citizens and understand the importance of having a healthy lifestyle. The arrangements to safeguard

pupils are secure. Pupils feel they can trust the adults in the school community and are comfortable about sharing any problems they may have with them. The academy is aware of the need to develop the pupil council further. This is seen as an important means of extending opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for shaping the future of the academy and contributing to the wider community.

- Progress in this area of provision is good.

Quality of provision

Overall, provision is good. The academy has good systems in place for identifying strengths and areas for development in the quality of teaching and learning and for bringing about improvement.

Pupils experience a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their needs and interests. A Year 7 nurture group has been established which provides good support for a small number of pupils who have very low prior attainment. The academy provides a 27 hour teaching week, and makes good use of additional lessons at the end of each day to support pupils who have fallen behind in mathematics and English and to provide an extensive range of enrichment activities. Each pupil selects two compulsory twilight sessions.

The quality of teaching was at least satisfactory in all lessons and was good or better in around two thirds, including four where the teaching was outstanding. The quality of the pupils' learning was closely matched to the quality of the teaching they received.

In the best lessons, clear learning objectives were shared with pupils at the beginning of the lesson, and revisited during the session; this helped to keep them focused on the task. The teachers' planning took account of what had previously been learned and they used questions effectively to identify what had been understood. Following evaluation of their learning the teachers provided good feedback to the pupils so that they could improve and develop their work. Tasks were carefully designed and provided pupils with good opportunities to extend their learning and develop independence. The teachers valued the contribution each pupil made and fostered positive relationships at all levels. Expectations of what the pupils could achieve were high and the teachers provided good exemplification of the standards that they expected the pupils to achieve and they were good role models.

The satisfactory lessons provided too few opportunities for the pupils to develop independence and they were over directed by the teachers;

opportunities for the pupils to discuss what they were learning were missed and some pupils were unclear about what they were expected to do. The quality of marking is thorough. Assessment is used well and pupil tracking and reporting systems are rigorous and provide pupils, teachers and parents with regular information about the pupils' progress in each curriculum area.

The academy and the pupils benefit from ICT being taught as a discrete subject in both Years 7 and 8. The academy is fortunate to have a number of advanced skills teachers and other talented staff who have a positive impact on provision, in particular by providing good models for using ICT as a teaching and learning tool and by disseminating good practice.

- Progress in this area of provision is good.

Leadership and management

The academy has greatly benefited from the principal's astute approach and vast experience. As a result, leadership and management are good. He has established a very clear vision for the development of the academy where every child matters. As such, there is a strong foundation on which to proceed as the number of pupils increases each year. The principal has appointed a very experienced senior leadership team that shares and understands the vision for developing a new academy. The principal, ably supported by the senior team, has succeeded in conveying the vision to the staff, pupils and parents and in gaining their commitment to building a successful academy where all pupils can achieve well. The academy's self-evaluation and development plan give a clear outline of the strengths and areas for development and what needs to be done before it reaches its full capacity. A real strength of the academy's work is the self-evaluation and critical approach to monitoring and evaluating provision.

The principal has ensured that the academy runs very smoothly through establishing very clear procedures for academic and pastoral care. There is a relentless focus on teaching and learning. Consequently, pupils have made significant progress. The rigorous assessment systems ensure that data are well managed and analysed. This has enabled the academy to quickly identify known groups of pupils at risk of underachieving. The innovative approaches to supporting pupils in the learning support unit, extension classes and mentoring programmes have had a significant impact on accelerating pupils' progress and improving their self-esteem. The academy has successfully helped all groups to have equal opportunities to achieve well.

Planning for improvement is extensive and targets are carefully validated. As such, the academy is not complacent. With the expertise and experience of the leadership team, the academy is well placed to build on the developments already made.

The academy is well supported by the sponsor and governing body, although most governors are new to governance. However, while the trustees monitor the academy's financial spending and are very supportive and keen for it to succeed, they are not yet critically evaluating the provision. There is a tendency to assume that development will occur without intervention and challenge.

The building is a striking feature in the community and is very well furnished and resourced, but the size of the classrooms and the shortage of space internally and externally present a number of restrictions, even at the early stage of the academy's development. The acoustics are poor in some areas. The constraints of the building present a challenge for the academy's development.

External support

The academy has developed strong working links with the ICT provider. This has led to it developing and sharing its expertise with the Learning Trust and other academies. However, the academy has been severely restrained from sharing its facilities with the wider community because of known and severe financial penalties. The academy has had support from child and welfare services to support pupils with specific needs.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

The academy is well aware of the actions it must take to sustain the strong foundation and should now:

- ensure that the governors are more involved in monitoring and evaluating the academy's progress;
- provide more opportunities for pupils to develop independent learning so they are not over-directed by teachers.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Academies Division at the DfES.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
HM Inspector of schools