

Cambridge
Education
Demeter House
Station Road
Cambridge CB1 2RS

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01223 578500
Direct F 01223 578501
risp.inspections@camb-ed.com



20 June 2008

Mr K Sadler
The Principal
Gateway Academy
Marshfoot Road
Tilbury
Thurrock
RM16 4LU

Dear Mr Sadler

Academies Initiative: Monitoring Visit to Gateway Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Brian Sharples HMI and Rashida Sheriff HMI to your academy on 17 and 18 June 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

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

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, visited 20 lessons, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, nominated staff, groups of students, governors, and a representative of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

Context

The academy opened on the two sites of its predecessor schools in September 2006 and moved into purpose built premises on the first day of this monitoring visit. The academy was closed for the previous week whilst the staff moved the resources accumulated on the predecessor sites into the new £38 million building. Year 11 examination commitments were maintained on a predecessor site.

Although smaller than average, the academy's roll continues to rise. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and of those who are learning English as an additional language is average but rising noticeably. The proportion of students, 25%, who have left or joined the academy other than at the normal admission times, is high. Attendance is well below the average for secondary schools.

The area that the academy serves displays a significant range of social and economic disadvantages. The proportion of girls and boys in each year group varies annually. Attainment on entry is below average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average and the percentage of students with a statement of special educational need is twice the national figure. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is three times the national average. A third of the students who left the predecessor schools in 2006 at age 16, did not progress to full time education, employment or training. The academy plans to develop sixth form opportunities for the current Year 10 after their GCSE examinations. The academy has specialisms in Arts, Design and Engineering

Achievement and standards

The outcomes at Key Stage 3 indicate that the proportion of students reaching the expected levels in English, mathematics and science was well below the national average in 2007. The proportion of students who secured five higher grade or five A*-G grade GCSEs in 2007 remained well below the national average, although the results represented a noticeable improvement from those obtained by the predecessor schools. Similarly, the proportion of students who obtained five A*-C grades that included English and mathematics was low, although recording some improvement on previous figures.

Senior managers correctly judge the outcomes of the national tests for students aged 14 and the public examinations results in 2007 as inadequate. The academy will publish its first full set of GCSE data in August 2008 and will, for the first time, be able to measure student progress in public examination courses. Senior staff are confident the results of the national tests at age 14 and the outcomes of public examinations will show improvement but are aware the academy is unlikely to attain the GCSE floor targets this year.

It is clear that the low standards and underachievement evident during the transition to academy status were directly related to ineffective provision and low attendance. Since 2006 as the quality of teaching and the curriculum provided have improved, so too have the outcomes of the national tests and public examinations. Visiting a random sample of 20 lessons, HMI noted that the standard of work achieved and the progress students make remain inextricably related to the quality of teaching and learning. Where teaching was effective, outcomes were close to the level expected for the age and ability of the students concerned; unfortunately, pupil progress was inadequate in a quarter of the lessons observed.

Personal development and well-being

Students are very positive about the academy and the opportunities it offers them to develop as young citizens. Their attitudes and behaviour in lessons are satisfactory, and quite often good. However, the management of behaviour by teachers remains inconsistent and not all staff are able to respond effectively to some of the challenging behaviour displayed by a small minority of students. The number of fixed term

exclusions has reduced significantly in the last nine months from 952 in 2006/7 to 73 in 2007/08; there was one permanent exclusion during this period.

The students are very excited about their new environment which they feel has been long in coming. They speak positively about their future ambitions through the enhanced resources made available to them and many are prepared to take greater responsibility when it is afforded them. The younger students, in particular, are pleased with the new restaurant provision and enjoy the healthy eating options available. A good number of students take advantage of the opportunities offered to them in sport, dance and drama activities including recent regional and national events.

The academy continues to work hard to improve attendance which stubbornly remains well below the national average at 88.7%. The issue is most acute in Years 9, 10 and 11. Nonetheless, on the first day of the monitoring visit attendance rose to 92%. Punctuality remains an issue with 27 students arriving late on the first day of the monitoring visit. Of these, 13 avoided the two members of staff who were on gate duty but were observed by the inspector and later picked up by the academy electronic registration system. The Inclusion team takes care to monitor and promote good attendance although the strategies employed have not yet had the required impact.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching and learning varies widely across the academy and is inadequate overall. The senior leaders have introduced an annual review process for each subject area whereby all staff are observed at least once. This has helped provide an accurate picture of the strengths and areas for improvement. The senior leaders generally have a good understanding of the effectiveness of individual teachers. However, where joint lesson observations took place between the inspectors and senior leaders, there was a difference in judgements in 50% of lessons seen. From the overall sample of lessons seen 25% were inadequate and just over 25% were good or outstanding. This variance in teaching and learning is one of the major restraints on improving standards and achievement.

The best lessons are well planned and appropriately target activities to meet the varying abilities within the group. Teachers show good subject knowledge and make very good use of questioning as a learning and evaluation tool. In two outstanding lessons the teachers made excellent use of varied teaching styles. For example, in a dance lesson video sequences were used well to help students carry out self evaluations, and a history lesson made good use of small group discussion to explore concepts. The start and closing sessions of these effective lessons are well planned to introduce concepts and secure learning. Students are motivated by these lessons and clearly enjoy their learning which in turn results in good progress. Positive relationships between staff and students is a common feature in most lessons.

Unfortunately the strategies employed in the best lessons are not as evident in the satisfactory and inadequate lessons. Where teaching is ineffective the direction and instruction of students is often unclear and planning does not sufficiently consider

the needs of individual learners. All too often students are not challenged by the activities provided, the pace of lessons is slow and progress made is limited. A consequence of such lessons is that student aspirations remain low. Another significant area of inconsistency is in the marking of students' work, which varies in its frequency, usefulness and effectiveness. This is an area which senior leadership team (SLT) has rightly prioritised for improvement.

The academy has specialisms in the Arts and Engineering. The subjects of music, art and design, drama and dance are all part of the specialist 'Arts' area and are performing well in the academy. The percentage of students gaining A*-C at GCSE in dance and drama is above the national average. The academy has conducted an audit of the 'Arts' based skills to see how these impact on other subject areas. Skills such as group work, social interaction, speaking and listening have recently been identified by senior staff as requiring development by other subjects. The academy has recently been involved in three high profile national events. These are; performing at the Royal Opera House, dance with the English National Ballet and work on the New Writers Project. Each of these links was made possible as a result of the academy's Arts specialism.

The current Year 10 students are the first group following a dual award GCSE in engineering. Links have been developed with a local college and a high school to start delivering a BTEC in engineering from this September. This will be a forerunner for a Diploma line due to commence in September 2010. It is too early to see any impact from the current engineering course. The options system has four pathways designed to meet the differing needs of students in the context of the local area, through a range of academic and vocational courses. Years 7 and 8 are offered three pathways whilst Years 9 and 10 are offered four. Pathway one offers mainly academic subject and is designed for the more academic student, pathways two and three offers a combination of academic and vocational subjects including a possibility of college placements and the fourth pathway provides a more personalised curriculum and work experience to increase motivation and reduce disaffection in the more vulnerable. The students generally understand the benefits of the four pathways; however, in discussions with Year 9 and 10 it was clear that they perceive some aspects of the system to be inflexible particularly by limiting the possibilities for movements between pathway one and two. Personalised learning pathways are available to students in Key Stage 3.

The inclusion team supports a growing number of students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities and those who are in danger of exclusion, through a range of intervention strategies.

The academy uses its assessment information to set challenging targets for students. Although data is available to track students' progress it is not effectively used by all departments or individual teachers to inform lesson planning; the mismatch with students' different learning needs was evident on a number of occasions.

Leadership and management

An effective senior management team has been established. It has a realistic view of the strengths and weaknesses to be found in teaching and learning. Self-evaluation is accurate and the key priorities for development have been identified. The principal is keenly aware of the need to rapidly improve standards and of the political imperative to exceed GCSE floor targets. The minutes of the governing body meetings detail a sharp focus on student progress and departmental targets.

Since forming in April 2007, the senior leadership team has concentrated on ensuring that systems and procedures to develop the quality of teaching and learning are secure and that an action plan is in place which targets the areas for improvement accurately. Timescales within the action plan are not always realistic and in some cases should be extended. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching is secure, members of the senior and middle management teams were invited to accompany HMI in the joint observation of teaching. The detailed analysis of learning developed with inspectors, highlighted areas where the academy's appraisal of the quality of learning can be further refined. However, if the academy is to secure the rapid improvement in standards and achievement sought, more needs to be done to improve the teaching in a number of departments.

The transfer of provision from the two predecessor sites was managed well, despite difficulties with the completion of facilities. The academy began operations in the new building in a calm and orderly manner. Two significant health and safety issues were drawn to the attention of the principal.

Although senior staff are in evidence at the change of lessons, there is a need for departmental leaders and pastoral staff to be more proactive in their interaction with students in the extensive corridors and on the staircases. The principal is keen to develop the role and competencies of middle managers in order to strengthen the leadership capacities at all levels. A new and as yet untested management structure has been introduced, but the capacity of some departmental staff to lead from the middle needs to be developed further. The academy's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

Financial management is sound with a small projected surplus for a year where one-off costs have been high. Interestingly, staff salaries account for only three-quarters of the budget and this modest percentage may account for some of the academy's recruitment difficulties; however, until test and examination results improve the question of value for money will remain problematical.

External support

The academy has evaluated the range of support received from inception to moving into the new building to be satisfactory. However, bearing in mind the complexity of the issues that emanated from the predecessor schools; to have secured the move to such a good facility is a significant achievement.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress. This visit has raised some concerns about the standard of education provided and the academy's performance will be monitored.

Priorities for further improvement

- Eliminate inadequate teaching and ensure that the majority of teaching and learning is good or better.
- Improve attendance.
- Monitor student progress consistently and use this information to ensure that standards and achievement improve.

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

Yours sincerely

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools