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Mr Nicholas O'Sullivan
Principal
Havelock Academy
Holyoake Road
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Dear Mr O'Sullivan,

Academies initiative: monitoring visit to Havelock Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Heather Richardson HMI and Susan Bowles HMI to your academy on 14-15 January 2009, 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. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal, other nominated staff, groups of students and a group of governors.

Context

Havelock Academy opened in September 2007, a year earlier than initially planned in the existing buildings of its predecessor school. Sixth form provision was introduced in September 2008 and is housed in temporary accommodation funded by the Department of Children Schools and Families (DCSF). New buildings are currently planned for completion in September 2011. The academy is sponsored by the David Ross Foundation. It has subject specialisms in mathematics and computing.

The academy is smaller than average with 875 students currently on roll including 35 in the sixth form. It serves an area which experiences significant social and economic disadvantage; the proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is almost twice the national average. Nearly all students are of White British heritage and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is low. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the number who have a statement to meet their special educational needs are well above the national average. The academy is fully subscribed in the lower year groups. However, a higher than average number of students, particularly in Forms 4 and 5, join or leave the academy at times other than the start of the year.

All staff of the predecessor school were given the opportunity to transfer to the academy when it opened. Staffing changes have reduced significantly over the last year. The staff complement has been extended since the academy opened, including two appointments made to extend the senior leadership team and eight non-teaching heads of house from September 2008. However, there have been difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified teachers especially in mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT).

A number of changes were made to the academy's organisation from September 2008. The academic calendar was changed to six terms and the structure of the day to six periods. A system was introduced which brings together groups of students from all years into eight houses. The day has been extended further with the introduction of a programme of optional co-curricular activities that provide further enrichment for students. The academy became a candidate school for the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme from September 2008 for students in Form 1. It is also a founding member of the Uppingham Collegiate.

Achievement and standards

Students join the academy with standards that are below the national average. However, there is some variation between year groups. In older classes, the proportion of students with lower prior attainment is higher whereas in Forms 1 and 2, the different abilities of students are more evenly distributed.

Information about the prior attainment of students at the predecessor school indicates that those transferring into Years 10 and 11 underachieved significantly during Key Stage 3. Provisional results from tests taken at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2008 confirm that a legacy of underachievement persists and that girls achieve better overall than boys by a significant margin. Targets were not met in English or science but students were close to meeting targets in mathematics as a result of well tailored strategies to close gaps in their prior learning. Weaknesses in literacy skills, particularly in reading, act as a barrier to learning for many students. Although actions taken to improve standards in reading have met with some success, the academy recognises that further work is required to ensure that reading skills are developed effectively across the curriculum to enable students to achieve greater success in their learning.

Provisional results for 2008 confirm that 34% of students attained five or more A* to C grades in GCSE or equivalent examinations. This fell short of the academy's targets and reflects past underachievement. The proportion of students gaining five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics rose to 27%. While these results exceeded the challenging target set by the academy, this figure remains below the National Challenge target of 30%.

A wide range of data are used to set challenging targets. Regular progress updates identify where students are at risk of underachievement or experiencing difficulty so that action may be taken to overcome obstacles and accelerate progress. However, the academy recognises that further refinement is required in the selection of data from which challenging targets are set and in the analysis of the performance of different groups of learners across all subjects. This will enable leaders to evaluate more precisely the impact of strategies used to raise students' achievement.

Academy leaders have adopted a long-term approach to raising achievement and standards by establishing firm foundations on which to build during a period of transition. A strong focus has been placed on raising teachers' expectations of what students are capable of achieving during their time at the academy. This has been supported by a comprehensive programme of staff training to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the introduction of a house system to provide effective pastoral support. Students report favourably on the changes that have taken place; many are more confident to participate actively in their learning and make better progress as a result. However, while the quality of teaching has improved, lesson plans are not always tailored sufficiently to ensure that the needs of all students are met. Consequently, the progress made by different groups of learners is uneven.

A number of strategies have also been introduced to raise achievement and standards in the shorter term. For example, as part of the drive to improve the proportion of students gaining good GCSE passes including English and mathematics, students currently in Year 11 were entered early for English Language GCSE. Recently published results confirm that 55% of students attained a grade C or above which is a significant improvement on previous years. National Challenge funding is now being used to provide additional mentoring for students in Year 11 to raise standards in mathematics. The most recent analysis of progress suggests that the current Year 11 are on track to meet their targets at the end of the year.

Personal development and well-being

The academy has worked hard to establish a community where students feel safe and secure. The introduction of the house system has acted as a catalyst for change, providing students with opportunities to build stronger relationships with others in different year groups and also with staff. Sixth formers spoke with conviction about the value they perceive in their involvement with younger students, whether supporting them with their reading, or helping to make house banquets a memorably sociable experience. Although it is in the early stages of its evolution,

students already identify strongly with their house and value the inter-house competitions and events that take place.

Staff, students and governors report that standards of behaviour at the academy have improved since it opened. The great majority of students have responded well to the higher expectations of behaviour communicated by staff. Their loyalty to the academy was evident during the inspection. Teachers act as good role models and manage inappropriate behaviour more confidently so disruptions are kept to a minimum. Good relationships are becoming a feature of lessons and less formal parts of school life. Students' attitudes to learning are generally positive, especially where lively teaching and varied activities captured and sustain their interest. Students report that lessons are disrupted less by the poor behaviour of a small minority of students. While fixed-term exclusions remain at a significant level, clear policies ensure these are targeted appropriately. Furthermore the isolation of students as a consequence of behavioural issues is being replaced by interventions that result more often in their successful reintegration into lessons. Students' enjoyment of school is enhanced further through the vast array of co-curricular opportunities, which enable students to share new and enjoyable experiences with staff and indirectly encourage more engagement with the formal curriculum.

The importance of good attendance and punctuality is regularly reinforced and promoted in a variety of ways. Students are motivated through competition, rewards, improving the climate for learning and the quality of the curriculum. The academy is tackling poor attendance and punctuality to school rigorously. A range of strategies have proved effective in improving attendance to around 92%. In a number of instances, sensitive support and guidance has enabled personal obstacles to attendance to be overcome. Improvement of attendance and punctuality in Form 5 has proved more challenging but close monitoring is having a beneficial effect, for example, in ensuring that the great majority of off-site learners attend regularly.

Sixth form students feel that they have been well supported in their transition to post-16 studies. They value the efforts made by staff to broaden their experiences, for example, through a recent visit to London.

Quality of provision

Of the lessons observed, almost all were satisfactory or better and just over a third were good. One lesson was outstanding. The academy has established a system for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning that informs leaders of where strengths and weaknesses lie. The academy's overall judgement of the quality of teaching and learning broadly matches that of inspectors. However, there is scope for the characteristics of learning and teaching observed to be recorded in greater detail so that they can be used to share best practice further and to assess the impact of actions taken to raise the overall quality of provision.

The extensive programme of staff training to improve teaching and learning and to support new curriculum developments is proving effective. Teachers are becoming

more reflective about the quality of learning in their lessons and some are developing the distinctive characteristics of teaching required to deliver the middle years programme in Form 1. However, although the academy has identified examples of good practice in all subject areas, the overall quality of teaching is not consistently good enough to enable all students to achieve as well as they might.

In the best lessons, teachers' high expectations and enthusiasm for their subject is infectious and captures students' interest. The use of a variety of practical activities supported by good resources including ICT sustains students' interests and motivates them to learn. Skilful use of questioning helps students to solve problems and extend their thinking effectively. Teachers listen attentively to students' responses and build on them, making good use of subject knowledge and modelling respect for different viewpoints. Students enjoy working together in groups and respond well when they are actively involved in their learning. In some cases, notably in Form 1, students are more confident to ask their own questions and are beginning to make connections between different areas of learning.

In less effective lessons, opportunities for students to participate actively or to take responsibility for their learning are more limited. Teachers sometimes talk for too long and students lose interest and occasionally become restless. Intended learning outcomes are not always clearly stated and lesson plans are not tailored sufficiently to include the necessary steps in learning that enable students of all abilities and needs to make the progress they might. Opportunities are missed to reinforce the development of literacy skills or to allow students to assess their own learning or that of their peers. On occasion, students are not held sufficiently to account for reaching their goals and drift off task or rely on their teachers to provide them with the answers they seek.

The academy has bold plans for the curriculum offered to its students. The plans are set within a clear rationale to equip students as learners and citizens in the twenty-first century. The curriculum is currently at an evolutionary stage, with a largely traditional curriculum for Forms 2 to 5 and the introduction of the pedagogy and assessment techniques within the framework of a candidate school for the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (MYP) for Form 1. All staff have been engaged in the process of curriculum development and design and plans to develop the MYP progressively through to Form 5 are set out in outline. The academy recognises the work still to be done in consolidating these plans to produce a coherent and progressive curriculum for all year groups. The current curriculum for Forms 2 to 5 is being influenced positively by the approaches to curriculum design and delivery promoted by MYP. In addition, the academy is beginning to take advantage of the flexibilities it has created; this is illustrated, for example in the introduction of AS level performing arts for students in Form 4. The availability of alternative pathways for students in Form 4 and 5 is helping to ensure that appropriate provision is available for all students. The academy has taken steps to ensure that those students on alternative courses, educated part or full-time at other

centres, are on track to achieve appropriate accreditation. The contribution of the academy's specialisms to the curriculum and to raising standards is at an early stage of development. Progress has been hindered due to difficulties in the recruitment of key staff.

Leadership and management

The principal has won the confidence and trust of staff and students through his highly effective leadership of the academy. Central to his vision for the academy is the creation of a culture of achievement that is based on strong relationships within a supportive and caring community. His ambition to 'broaden horizons' for students and their families underpins the two key priorities that he has tackled since the academy opened. These are namely to establish a culture which increases students' self-belief and aspirations and to develop practice in teaching that encourages students to become confident learners, equipped with the skills and knowledge that they will need in their future lives.

The extended senior leadership team has been restructured to focus on developing a culture amongst staff and students that is based on mutual respect. Senior leaders understand their roles of accountability and are developing their lead roles in the implementation of the academy development plan. A process of self-review, involving both senior and middle leaders, informs planning and enables good practice and new ideas to be shared freely. The impact of this has been to build the confidence of staff at all levels to reflect on their practice and to adopt new approaches to teaching which have a greater impact on students' learning.

The principal has united staff and inspired high levels of commitment to implementing the many changes that have taken place since the academy opened. Staff report that expectations of them have been high. However, they feel empowered by the training and support they have received to develop their roles and to contribute to the extensive programme of improvement strategies identified in the development plan. Leaders and managers at all levels talk with enthusiasm about the changes that have taken place in recent months. However, the precise measures that senior and middle leaders will use to evaluate the impact of actions taken to meet whole-academy priorities in the short and medium term are not all clearly identified.

Governors bring a broad range of expertise to the role of providing support and challenge. They are well briefed by the principal about progress made in the academy and performance against key indicators. Finances are carefully managed and a five-year plan is in place to ensure that the many initiatives that have been introduced, including the opening of the sixth form and the house system are sustainable in the longer term.

External support

Academy leaders have used external support effectively to support the implementation of their development plan. The principal has valued the support and challenge provided by the representative of the DCSF during a period of change. The school improvement partner provides further challenge through the review of students' standards and achievement. Links have been established with schools in the independent sector to help to build students' aspirations and confidence. As part of the Uppingham Collegiate, good practice has also been shared to support the development of the house system at the academy. Academy leaders and governors value the active support of the sponsor, for example, in fundraising for specific initiatives.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise standards, particularly in English and mathematics
- Improve the proportion of lessons where learning is good order to accelerate students' progress further
- Establish clear measures of progress by which senior and middle leaders can evaluate precisely, the impact of actions taken to meet whole-school priorities

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

Yours sincerely

Sara Morrissey
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc chair of governors
the Academies Group, DCSF [Paul.hann@dczf.gsi.gov.uk]