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18 March 2010

Principal
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Dear Mr O'Sullivan

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Maltings Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with David Jones HMI, to your academy on 16 and 17 March 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit 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, senior leaders, groups of students and the chair of governors.

Context

Maltings Academy opened in September 2008 sponsored by Greensward Charitable Trust at the same time as Greensward Academy and New Rickstones Academy. The Clacton Coastal Academy was added in September 2009. The John Bramston School, the predecessor school, was placed in special measures in October 2006. The current principal was appointed to it, initially as an interim principal on secondment from Greensward College with whom an informal partnership had been brokered by Essex local authority. A vice-principal was also seconded; other members of the senior team were largely the same. The initial brief of the partnership was to remove the school from special measures and this took place in June 2008. After an initial period of high staff turnover from the predecessor school, staffing has become more stable. Of the three academies that opened in 2008, each has its own ethos,



principal, senior team and governing body, and together form a partnership sharing the Trust's overarching vision. On becoming an academy, Maltings nominated sport as an area of specialism with science proposed as the second. There is joint sixth form provision between the Maltings and New Rickstones Academies although currently very few students access this shared provision. A formal sixth form consortium arrangement is planned from 2011 that will involve greater collaboration over course choices. The principal will leave the academy at the end of the academic year; arrangements are in place to appoint a successor. The decline in student numbers since 2006 has led to a redundancy situation this year affecting teaching and support staff. Student numbers are rising in the sixth form. There are plans for Maltings Academy to move to new buildings on the same site in September 2011.

Maltings Academy is of average size. There are currently 965 students on roll, including 196 in the sixth form. The academy serves a mixed socio-economic area. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average but rising, linked to an increase in unemployment in the area. Attainment on entry is variable across cohorts ranging from broadly average to well below the national average. There are fewer students entering the academy with attainment at the higher levels from Key Stage 2 than found elsewhere on average. A very large majority of students are of White British heritage with a few students from a range of other minority ethnic groups. The number of students who speak English as an additional language is low. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national figure.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are rising with some indicators close to the national average. For example, in 2009, 65% of students gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C, an improvement of 11 percentage points on previous performance. This was because of a stronger focus on the quality of teaching and learning, greater flexibility in subject choices, and targeted intervention through mentoring. However, when English and mathematics are included the proportion reaching this benchmark is 37% which is significantly below average. In English, 42% of students gained a grade A*-C, and 55% in mathematics. Whilst standards improved in mathematics they remained low. Standards in English were below those reached in 2008, a situation explained by staff absence that disrupted students' learning and progress. The academy successfully maintained the above average results of its predecessor school in science as a result of course choices well matched to students' needs. In 2009, students made better progress overall than students in 2008 in the predecessor school although this was still below that expected. Current students' progress data and GCSE results already secured indicate an improvement in the proportion of students expected to gain A*-C grades in both English and mathematics. Leaders are rightly focusing on increasing the proportion of top grades to support progression to advanced courses. Standards have improved



in Key Stage 3 and indicate broadly average standards in English, mathematics and science.

Students enter the sixth form with standards below those found nationally. Results in 2009, indicate that the pass rate at A2 was in line with the national average, an improvement on 2008. However, too many students drop out at the end of Year 12 as they are not prepared well enough for advanced courses. This is compounded by the restricted range of courses on offer and limited progression routes from Key Stage 4.

The academy makes use of increasingly challenging targets to raise aspirations and expectations across all cohorts, and to identify students at risk of under performing. Assessment and tracking systems have been strengthened to provide regular analysis of progress with a sharper focus on different groups of learners. Training is in place to ensure that subject leaders and teachers are able to make full use of this information to inform teaching and learning, with appropriate intervention. Students are aware of their targets and in many lessons have the opportunity to discuss grade descriptors to support improvement. Standards that were low are on the way up but remain the greatest challenge for the academy in ensuring all students gain the qualifications to support their future economic well-being.

Evidence from lesson observation indicates that students enjoy their lessons, and work productively with staff and each other.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Attendance for the current academic year is above the national average and has improved from that recorded by the predecessor school. Unauthorised absence has decreased and punctuality to lessons is good.

The level of exclusion has declined significantly when compared to the 2008/9 data and effective behaviour management systems are in place. Students' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Students thrive when given opportunities to take responsibility for their learning. They are very loyal to the academy and feel strongly that it has improved. Students feel that the academy needs to be more proactive in developing its reputation locally and nationally. Relationships between students, and between staff and students, are characterised by good humour and respect which promote the students' maturity and confidence.

The results of the recent student questionnaire note that more than 83% feel safe and happy in and around the academy and a similar proportion feel valued and cared for. Similarly, 81% state they have not been bullied recently; 83% feel that when there are issues they are dealt with quickly and effectively. Safeguarding procedures meet current government requirements.



The effectiveness of provision

The majority of teaching seen was good, with some that was judged outstanding. In an outstanding Year 12 physics lesson the careful match of conceptual challenge to student learning styles and abilities, allowed individuals to make significant progress. Similarly, in an outstanding Year 9 art lesson the teacher used the students' well-developed criteria based peer assessment skills to drive forward learning.

Most students make good progress because teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons to provide a variety of different learning opportunities. In the best lessons, teachers carefully monitor students' progress and use questioning effectively to help them develop their understanding. The quality of questioning is often the significant factor in the learning outcomes secured. Where teachers focus their questions of the learning objective and encourage students to develop their own answers or to extend the contributions of others, learning flourishes. Most staff make appropriate use of the assessment data available and many check learning effectively during the lesson. Some teachers provide well developed formative comments; however, evidence from a brief scrutiny of the students' books indicates some variations in the quality of guidance offered. Where progress is slower, work is sometimes not well matched to the students learning needs or the pace of the lesson is allowed to decline.

The range of curriculum opportunities provided in Key Stage 3 is a positive feature and the mixture of academic and vocational developments available in Key Stage 4 continues to evolve. Although the current Key Stage 4 option system is well balanced with clear academic and vocational pathways these have yet to fully impact on standards and achievement. For example, GCSE outcomes in science, one of the academy specialisms, were significantly above the national average in 2009 and the numbers of students taking science courses post-16 has risen. However, the numbers of students who drop out of courses post-16 remains a concern. The academy has perceived the need to strengthen the range of skills-based courses, from Year 7 to Year 12, in order to improve retention rates post-16 and raise standards at AS level.

A well-balanced care, guidance and support system has been effective at improving behaviour, reducing exclusion and raising attendance. Students speak very positively about the support systems in place and the personal support provided by staff. Year 10 and 11 students feel that the impact of this care and guidance can be seen in the positive atmosphere in lessons and is one of the factors behind the rising levels of attendance.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The academy is effectively led by the principal and senior leaders. Adjustments to leadership responsibilities have taken place to provide a stronger focus on



achievement; the academy has also invested in the development of eight advanced skills teachers. The principal has created a positive ethos for staff and students which has resulted in a shared commitment to achieve success for the academy. Fundamental to this has been the focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning, and staff stability. The academy has implemented a clear strategy to improve the quality of teaching, firstly to eliminate inadequate teaching and secondly to develop the most talented teachers through professional development and peer observation. A coaching programme is now in place to support further improvements in teaching underpinned by a comprehensive range of training opportunities to develop and share best practice. Much of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is conducted by senior leaders and advanced skills teachers on a pre-planned basis. Training is taking place for middle leaders incorporating paired observation to strengthen quality assurance and accountability. Crucial to the academy's improvement has been its approach to discipline which has transformed the climate for learning.

Self-evaluation is systematic with key indicators to support a regular review of progress. A key priority has been the improvement in the proportion of students gaining higher grades in English and mathematics. Through careful and thorough action planning, improvements have been made to raise standards. Governance is strong and effective. Through explicit links with senior leaders, nominated governors undertake robust monitoring of performance indicators through termly reviews of evidence. Close links with partner academies help to meet common needs such as governor training. The management board of the Academies Enterprise Trust provides strategic direction and support. The provision of training and development is a strong feature.

External support

Work with partner academies provides good opportunities to share practice, and to develop common policies, for example, on assessment and discipline. Maltings has made good use of expertise from the trust to support the training of middle leaders which has raised their status and expectations. The School Improvement Partner provides healthy challenge to the academy and assists in the validation of the academy's self-evaluation through quality assurance activities. The academy has retained productive links with the local authority.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of higher GCSE grades, especially in the core subjects.



- Ensure that evaluations of teaching quality take account of progress over time for different ability groups to inform personalised professional development for staff.
- Further develop the quality of guidance and support, and curriculum progression to ensure effective transition to the sixth form in order to improve retention rates and raise standards.
- Further develop the capacity of middle leaders to monitor, evaluate and increase the proportion of good or better lessons.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State Paul Hann, the chair of governors and the Academies Group at the Department for Children, Schools and Families. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nada Trikić

Her Majesty's Inspector