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The Principals
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Dear Mr Willis, Mr Beamish and Mrs Davies

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Longfield Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Kekshan Salaria to your academy Longfield Academy on 12 and 13 May 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, met with the federation chief executive officer, principals, governors and staff. Informal conversations were also held with students in lessons and during breaks

Context

The Longfield Academy opened in September 2008. It is federated with The Leigh Technology Academy and has The Leigh Academies Trust as lead sponsor, with Kent County Council and The University of Kent as co-sponsors.

Most of the 871 students who attend the academy are of White British Heritage and girls make up around one third of the student population. Few students speak English as an additional language and almost none are at the early stages of learning English. The overall proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is slightly above average but there is significant variation across year groups. There are more students who have special educational needs than is typical for a school of this size and the proportion who have a statement of special

educational needs is more than double the national average, partly due to the academy having a unit for students who have autistic spectrum disorder. The academy has a relatively stable student population and is oversubscribed for the 2010 entry, but there are places available in some current year groups. The small sixth form has around 130 students and operates a collaborative arrangement with two local colleges, the Leigh Technology Academy and one other local school. The academy is housed in the buildings of the predecessor school but there are plans to move to adjacent purpose-built accommodation in 2011.

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

The academy's tracking data and inspectors' observations of students' work in lessons shows that an increasing proportion of students are on track to achieve challenging targets. Results from early examination entries and completed modules suggest that outcomes for students at the end of Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are likely to be significantly higher than those achieved in the academy's first year. This improvement can be attributed to changes to the curriculum, improvements in teaching and well-focussed intervention and support for students who were underperforming.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students' attendance is closely monitored. Because students who do not attend regularly are challenged and supported, overall attendance is improving, and the proportion of students who are persistently absent is reducing. Behaviour is good both in lessons and around the academy. Good relationships at all levels support learning. There have been no permanent exclusions and the number of students being excluded for fixed periods is reducing. The vertical tutoring system is having a positive impact on students' personal development and the academy has a very inclusive ethos.

The effectiveness of provision

Systematic monitoring of lessons has ensured that senior leaders are well informed about strengths and areas for development in teaching. Several cross-curricular teaching and learning communities have been developed to share good practice and help teachers improve their lessons. There are plans to re-structure the academy day to support curriculum development and this will also provide further opportunities for staff development and collaboration between staff. The curriculum has been reviewed and additional changes are planned to ensure that it is closely matched to the needs and interests of students and to provide a broader range of good enrichment activities. Teachers have good information about students' prior learning and additional needs and some teachers make good use of this information to plan their lessons. However, this is not yet fully embedded across the academy. In many lessons, students are given good opportunities to evaluate their own

progress but a minority of lessons are directed too closely by teachers and students do not have enough opportunity to develop independence and take responsibility for their own learning and progress. Opportunities for speaking and listening are not built systematically into lessons and chances are missed to develop the use of key vocabulary and allow students to explain their thinking at length.

The academy's specialisms have encouraged more students to participate in science and the arts but many initiatives are at an early stage of development and have had only limited impact on raising attainment.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The senior leaders have high aspirations for what students can achieve. They challenge and support staff and students to improve and they have been effective in tackling weaknesses and building on strengths. Good partnerships are being developed, for example, collaboration with other schools to improve sixth-form provision.

The academy's self-evaluation is accurate and informs planning so that priorities for improvement are appropriate and sharply focussed on improving outcomes for students and raising attainment. The impact of the actions taken demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement.

External support

The school improvement partner has been effective as a critical friend and strong partnerships are developing with a range of external organisations, including other schools and colleges. The federation partnership is making a significant contribution to accelerating improvement.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Build on improvement to teaching to increase the proportion of lessons that is consistently good or better.
- Ensure that lesson planning takes full account of the needs and interests of all the different groups of students.
- Enable all students to be active participants in their learning.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Academies Group at the Department for Education. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Robert Ellis
Her Majesty's Inspector