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10 November 2011

Mr C Morrison
Principal
King's Lynn Academy
Queen Mary Road
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Dear Mr Morrison

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of King's Lynn Academy

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy on 8 and 9 November 2011 with Ian Middleton HMI, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection 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, groups of staff and students, and the Chair of the Governing Body.

Context

The academy opened in September 2010, replacing Park High School which was in special measures after its inspection in November 2009. The academy is sponsored by the College of West Anglia with Norfolk County Council. It has specialisms in mathematics, business and enterprise. The academy has funding for a major refurbishment and some new buildings, starting in spring 2012 and to be completed by September 2013. Most staff transferred from the predecessor school. However, around a third of staff have joined since the academy opened. The academy was led by a National Leader for Education on a temporary basis from May 2010. The new principal took up his post in June 2011.

The academy is smaller than average with a very small sixth form. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Just over 10% of students speak English as an additional language. There is a higher than average proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. More students than average join or leave the academy during the school year. After a decline in the number of students joining Year 7 in 2010 compared with the previous intake of the predecessor school, numbers increased again in 2011 and are projected to increase further in 2012.

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

Achievement at the end of Key Stage 4 is improving. The provisional results for Year 11 students in 2011 indicate a substantial rise to the national average in the proportion of students achieving at least five higher GCSE grades A* to C. The proportion achieving at least five higher grades including English and mathematics doubled in comparison to results of the predecessor school and passed the national floor standard, closing the gap on the average nationally. Many students reached the challenging targets set for them. The academy's own assessment information indicates that Year 11 students made satisfactory progress overall from their starting points and improved considerably on the inadequate progress achieved in the predecessor school. Boys and students who speak English as an additional language made most progress. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities made satisfactory progress. Girls and students known to be eligible for free school meals made less progress than their peers.

The academy has developed an effective system for recording and analysing assessments of students' performance. Staff regularly review the progress made by groups of students and individuals to identify those at risk of underachievement. This assessment information indicates that current Year 11 students are on track to match or improve on results this year. However, students' progress in Key Stage 3 is not as secure and the academy has rightly identified this as a priority for improvement.

In the 20 lessons observed during the inspection, students made mostly satisfactory progress because of the improving teaching they receive and the quality of interventions for those identified as being at risk of underachieving. Students generally settle to work promptly and enjoy working collaboratively. In the best lessons, they showed their enjoyment, especially where a mathematics teacher moved learning on at pace or in a sixth form history lesson where students were set a practical group task.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour in lessons is improving. In most lessons, students are attentive and cooperate well with teachers. Where teaching is good or better, students respond with great enthusiasm to questions, express interest in the subject matter and show

independence. However, the start of some lessons is slowed by poor punctuality and a few students do not listen attentively and lack the ability to concentrate. Students report improved behaviour around the school site. They feel safe and understand the series of warnings and sanctions arising from the revised behaviour policy. Strategies to manage behaviour have reduced the number of students subject to fixed period exclusions, although the proportion remains high.

Students' attendance is rising but remains below average overall. The current attendance figure at 91% is 4% higher than at the same point last year. However, too many students remain persistent absentees and miss lessons at critical times. This is despite the academy implementing a broad range of strategies to encourage students to attend regularly. Teaching and support staff investigate absenteeism efficiently and the academy uses support from external agencies well. Higher attendance in Year 7 provides the academy with a good foundation on which to build, with the support of parents and carers.

The effectiveness of provision

The quality of teaching is improving. Effective action by senior leaders has reduced the proportion of lessons judged as inadequate. Two of the 20 lessons observed on this visit were judged inadequate. All other teaching was at least satisfactory. However, not enough teaching is consistently good or better. As a result of a thorough programme of professional development and the setting of clear expectations, teachers now set precise objectives for learning. They plan lessons carefully and structure activities effectively. In the best lessons, teachers set a brisk pace and challenge all students to learn, using a wide range of materials and approaches to engage students' interest. This is not the case in all lessons. Too often, teachers provide the same work for all students regardless of their differing abilities. They do not use questions effectively enough to assess students' understanding and develop their thinking. As a result, students are too passive and too many lack confidence orally. Occasionally, expectations of students are not high enough, leading to insufficient volume of work in books and poor presentation.

Systems for assessing students have improved. Students know their targets and there are clear procedures for recording their progress across subjects. Nevertheless, this improvement is still new and practice across the academy is not consistently effective. There is some very detailed and helpful marking with clear guidance to students on how to improve their work, for example in English and religious education. However, some marking focuses too much on effort rather than learning. Although students assess their own and each other's work in some subjects, this is in its early stages.

The academy has begun to use its specialism in mathematics, business and enterprise to drive improvement. This is particularly the case in mathematics. Imaginative plans exist to develop the specialism further, especially through enterprise education. Curriculum continuity between primary schools and the

academy has been strengthened. Year 7 students study some subjects with one teacher through themes. Where it is taught well, students draw on their prior experience effectively and develop new skills in response to challenging activities. While improvements to the curriculum already meet the individual needs and interests of many students, the academy recognises that more development is required to engage those whose achievement and attendance remains too low.

There is effective support for students at risk of underachieving and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, the individual intervention and booster classes used with Year 11 raised achievement, especially in mathematics. Effective intervention practice is now adopted across all years.

Sixth form

The achievement of students who pursued A-level courses in 2011 was satisfactory, given their low prior attainment. However, retention into Year 13 was low in 2011 and teaching groups are often very small. Students' achievement at AS level was inadequate in 2011. The academy has improved systems to ensure that students begin their courses with the necessary skills and experience. There are well-considered plans to improve provision by strengthening local partnerships to match students to courses that better meet their needs and abilities. Current sixth form students expressed positive attitudes about improvements across the academy, their enjoyment of courses and their progress.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The new principal sets a clear vision for the academy and has a very accurate understanding of its strengths and areas for development. Staff are committed to improving achievement and rightly proud of the rise in the results of Year 11 students in 2011. Students speak positively about the changes to their experience since the academy opened. There are developing systems for reviewing the academy's performance and monitoring student progress closely. Staff regularly analyse the outcomes from this monitoring and use the information effectively to identify areas for improvement, which are incorporated into clear action plans. Members of the senior leadership team have clear roles but the principal is rightly reviewing the relationships between the roles of senior and middle leaders to avoid duplication and clarify accountability. Leaders increasingly share effective practice and use regular meetings to ensure that successful strategies are adopted widely.

The governing body sets a clear strategic direction for the academy. Its work is well organised and a full range of policies and practices exist to steer the academy's progress. External reviews of provision and training for governors on their role support the governing body in holding the academy to account.

The academy's capacity to improve is accelerating because key actions have led to rising attainment and greater student progress. Rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching, based on a regular cycle of lesson observations, provides a very clear understanding of developing strengths in teaching and continuing areas for improvement to focus coaching programmes for teachers. These strategies contribute to the improving trend of achievement in the academy. However, in all these areas there is more to do to ensure that the academy's performance is at least in line with national averages.

External support

The academy receives effective and continuing support from a range of partners. Senior staff have received training on observing lessons. The academy has commissioned external reviews of several subjects which have identified important areas for development. The School Improvement Partner provides robust challenge to the senior staff on the progress made since the academy opened.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise attainment further in Key Stage 4 so that it is at least average by maintaining the trend of improvement in English and mathematics. Increase teachers' expectations of the quality, volume and presentation of students' work, especially in Key Stage 3.
- Further improve teaching so that a clear majority is at least good by increasing the pace of lessons, improving challenge for students based on their differing abilities, and developing effective use of questioning to check students' understanding and promote their thinking. Ensure that students receive high-quality feedback on how to improve their work.
- Work with parents and carers to improve students' attendance to at least the national average, and increase punctuality by enforcing clear expectations.
- Complete the review of sixth form provision to ensure that it meets students' needs and raises achievement.
- Sharpen the clarity of leadership roles and eliminate duplication of responsibilities between senior and middle leaders.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, 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

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc David Pomfret, Chair of the Governing Body
The Academies Advisers Unit, DfE [colin.diamond@education.gsi.gov.uk]