

11 February 2011

Dr Therese Quincey
Principal
Red House Academy
Rutherglen Road
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR5 5LN

Dear Dr Quincey,

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Red House Academy

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy on 9 and 10 February 2011, 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 and other members of staff, students, and the Chair of the Governing Body, who also represented the sponsors.

Context

The new purpose-built academy opened in September 2009 and is sponsored by the Leighton Group. It is smaller in size than most secondary schools and the academy's specialism is engineering. There are 564 students aged 11 to 16, with boys outnumbering girls. Virtually all are of White British heritage. The proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and with home languages other than English are well below the national average. The academy serves local communities in north Sunderland where there is a long history of low aspirations and disengagement from education. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is more than twice the national average.

Students enter the academy with low reading ages and a level of attainment which is often exceptionally low. One third of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities which is well above the national average. The number with statements of special educational needs is much lower than usually found. About half of the staff of the predecessor school, including the Principal, transferred to the academy when it opened.

Three new senior leaders and 10 curriculum leaders have been appointed. There are difficulties in recruiting staff in English, mathematics, and to national challenge posts.

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

The academy has made satisfactory progress in raising attainment and achievement in the last year. Thirty per cent of students gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C including both English and mathematics in 2010 compared with 18% in the final year of the predecessor school. The academy recognises that, although this was a significant improvement, it fell short of the target at 34%. Fifty four per cent of students gained five or more A* to C GCSE grades over a similar period which exceeded the academy target. Inspection evidence confirms that an increasing proportion of students are on track to achieve or exceed challenging targets in 2011. This represents satisfactory and improving progress in relation to the low starting points.

The academy exceeded the subject specialist target in design and technology, was close to meeting it in mathematics and fell short in science. Many students demonstrate increasingly positive attitudes to learning and say they enjoy challenging lessons which engage them productively in lessons. The academy has a sharp focus on improving achievement and provides an effective intervention programme to raise aspirations. As a result, standards are now higher at Key Stage 3 than in the predecessor school. Robust assessment information shows more students are making better progress, including the high proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Behaviour is satisfactory and improving. Students know what is expected of them, for example, in lessons when listening and responding to tasks and questions. A large majority of students say that they feel safe and enjoy their learning. They are confident in their manner and show increasingly positive attitudes to learning. The academy promotes well-being through physical education, extra-curricular sport and healthy school lunches. The focus on learning and acquiring key skills in literacy and numeracy is making a positive contribution to students' future economic well-being.

Attendance remains low but is improving strongly. Robust procedures have been adopted and implemented very successfully to tackle poor attendance and improve the students' punctuality. The school is successfully tackling the number of students who are persistent absentees. The academy's international links are making a strong impact on cultural development.

The effectiveness of provision

Teaching and assessment to support learning are satisfactory and improving. This is due to more robust monitoring and evaluation by senior managers which is helping the staff to know how effective their teaching is. The proportion of good and better teaching is rising and the academy knows it is not yet high enough to secure higher standards. Students are better informed about how well they are doing, and what they need to do to improve their work. In contrast, students' presentation of their work lacks a sense of personal pride in what is produced and work of this standard is rarely challenged by teachers. Senior leaders have already identified this as a priority and made it a focus for improvement. The most successful teaching results in a faster pace of learning; it also reflects more accurately on the range of abilities in the class and caters for all groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Planning skilfully combines teaching tasks and activities to sustain interest and concentration. Good working routines are established and teachers check pupils' understanding frequently. The teaching is less successful when the work is insufficiently tailored to challenge pupils of all abilities. In these lessons, students often spend too much time listening as a class and not developing their understanding by engaging in their own work and learning.

The curriculum is developing well, particularly at Key Stage 4 where there are increasing opportunities for the students to take a range of accredited courses from traditional academic to vocational options. The range of extra-curricular activities adds to the learning experiences available to all students.

The academy is making effective progress in caring for, supporting and guiding its students. Evidence from the inspection indicates the support for students with identified learning needs, those at risk of exclusion, or those displaying short-term challenging behaviour is improving, as the support structures become better known and more consistently used by staff. Individualised curricular provision for these students is helping to improve their attitudes to learning, and helping them to make satisfactory progress in their work. This provision has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of recorded incidents of anti-social behaviour and bullying since the opening of the academy. The responsibility to safeguard all students is taken very seriously, and all reasonable efforts are made to ensure that the health, safety and general well-being of the students. Child protection procedures are clear, and the school fulfils its statutory requirements for safeguarding all students.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The senior leaders' clear vision for improvement is making sure the upward trend of development continues. Self-evaluation is accurate and capacity to improve is good because effective action has been taken to tackle any weaknesses. Leadership and management at all levels have successfully driven improvements in the last year. New appointments at middle and senior level have made a significant impact in raising the quality of leadership

and monitoring of performance is leading to more effective practice. There is still work to be done to further improve the effectiveness of all subject leaders in promoting better teaching and raising standards. Academy leaders have established high and realistic expectations of the progress students should make and rigorously tackle any underachievement. Senior managers have focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning through effective monitoring of pace and challenge in lessons.

The governing body has a clear and sharply focussed vision for the future. Strategic decisions are well taken and based on regular and accurate evaluations of performance. They have an accurate picture of the extent of performance and improvement which results in swift action where it is most required. Safeguarding procedures meet requirements and are routinely monitored. New processes for assuring the quality of teaching and learning are now established, such as learning walks, work scrutiny, formal lesson observations and regular meetings to challenge leaders on students' progress. A range of successful initiatives have created a positive ethos of achievement and inclusion in the academy and leaders are now rightly intent on improving students' learning and progress in all lessons.

External support

The academy's sponsors are providing strong support and challenge, for example, through links with local business and initiatives to raise aspirations. The governing body strongly support the academy and are well aware of the progress being made in raising standards. The academy's improvement partner is helping the academy to sharpen its analysis of achievement and results.

Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Raise attainment to meet and exceed all targets.
- Make sure all teaching is good and better by:
 - sharing the best practice
 - ensuring that assessment practice is consistently good in all subjects
 - making sure students work is always well presented.
- Ensure the quality of leadership in all subjects consistently matches the best in promoting better teaching and raising standards.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Hancock
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc Chair of the Governing Body
 the Academies Group, DCSF [Paul.hann@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk]