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Mr A Di-Finizio
The Principal
Hans Price Academy
Marchfields Way
Weston-Super-Mare
BS23 3QP

Dear Mr Di-Finizio

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Hans Price Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with David Edwards, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 27–28 June 2012, 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, senior leaders, middle managers and groups of students. They also met with the Chair and vice-chair of Hans Price Academy Council, the Executive Principal of the Cabot Learning Federation and the Chair of Cabot Federation Learning Board.

Context

Hans Price Academy opened in May 2011, following the closure of Wyvern Community School. It is part of the Cabot Learning Federation, which is sponsored by the University of the West of England and Rolls Royce. This is a relatively small academy, with 738 students on roll, aged from 11 to 16. About one third of students are known to be entitled to free school meals and this is above the national average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average, with the vast majority of students from White British backgrounds. A small minority of

students speak English as an additional language. Just under half of the students are disabled or have special educational needs, most of which are behavioural, emotional and social issues. A new principal took up his post when the academy opened. All staff initially transferred from the predecessor school but a restructuring of the senior leadership team has recently taken place. A new building is planned to be ready in the spring of 2014.

Achievement of pupils at the academy

At the time of the closing of the predecessor school, students' attainment was significantly below national benchmarks, with only 23% gaining five or more A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics. Although a high proportion of the students started Year 7 with skills that were below national expectations, achievement over time was inadequate. Current academy predictions based on examinations and modules where the results have already been confirmed indicate that standards at the end of Year 11 have made a remarkable improvement, doubling the proportion of students set to gain five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics. This would comfortably exceed the national benchmark. Consequently, the academy is confident that it is already successfully narrowing the gap between the attainment of its students and those nationally. Rectifying the legacy of underachievement in all year groups has been a priority since the academy opened. Evidence from examinations, completed modules and work scrutiny indicates that progress for the vast majority of students has accelerated. An initial priority was to raise achievement in the current Year 11 cohort and this has been successfully tackled through intervention strategies in which personalised programmes have provided high quality support for individual students.

There is a relentless focus on raising the students' skills in literacy and numeracy, with a clear emphasis on ensuring they are developed for sustainability in the next stage of their education and career choices. The rigorous tracking systems and review processes which students undertake with individual teachers ensure that students' progress is monitored regularly. This consistent approach enables those students whose progress has not accelerated at the same rapid rate as others to be swiftly identified. For instance, Year 7 have made rapid progress during this academic year because the curriculum has been reorganised to meet their needs better. Nevertheless, the academy is fully aware that, although students who are known to be entitled to free school meals are making progress, it is at a slightly slower rate than others in their peer groups. Measures have already been introduced to tackle this issue and they are being carefully monitored and evaluated.

The quality of teaching

As teaching steadily improves, the rate of the students' learning and progress is accelerating. In the best lessons, expectations of work and behaviour are high. Routines are clearly understood and there is a mutual respect between the teacher and the class. Students understand what they need to learn because the intention of the session is made clear to them and teachers have secure subject knowledge.

Individual gains in learning are accurately assessed against steps to success, which are tailored to meet the aims of each lesson. For example, in literacy and mathematics sessions, students were observed assessing how well they had grasped subject-specific concepts and consolidated key skills. Students learn best when teachers involve them in the lesson, excite them with their own enthusiasm for and expertise in the subject and allow time for reflection. This was well illustrated in an art lesson, where the students were motivated by the teacher's knowledge and passion for the subject. The lesson also promoted their spiritual development well and, by sensibly organising themselves into working groups, they demonstrated good social skills.

Students speak positively about the improvements which have been made to the marking system. They appreciate knowing 'WWW', (what they have done well) and use 'EBI', (even better if) to improve their learning. Nevertheless, the quality of learning is not as high as it should be when teachers' expectations are low, sessions lack pace and there is too much emphasis on adult-led activities which result in inactivity on the part of students. On occasions, opportunities to challenge the higher attaining students are missed. The support given to students who are disabled and who have special educational needs is of high quality, with provision ensuring equal access for all.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students report that they feel very safe in the academy and talk positively about the improvements that have been made to support their pastoral needs. They have a greater understanding of what is expected of them and explain that the amount of learning time wasted by disruptive behaviour in class has reduced considerably. Both staff and students agree that behaviour has improved substantially during the past year. They are particularly appreciative of the 'restorative justice' process which has been successfully introduced to manage behavioural problems and relationship issues within the academy community. Teaching staff have responded well to taking control of behavioural issues within the classroom. Consequently, the time that students are out of lessons for sanctions has vastly reduced, thus improving learning opportunities.

Students are very proud of their new school uniform and they feel that already their smart appearance has changed some of the negative perceptions of them in the community. They are confident that their reputation is improving and a greater involvement in the wider community is enhancing this situation. For example, Year 10 students were proud to represent their academy alongside the Mayor and Mayoress of Weston-super-Mare and the local Member of Parliament. Residents at a nearby residential home for senior citizens appreciated a special Diamond Jubilee celebration tea, which was organised by Year 9 students.

Prior to the opening of the academy, attendance was very poor. Students were dissatisfied with the quality of lessons and aspirations for their attainment were low. Students report that now most teachers are much more enthusiastic and 'seem on board' with the academy. Students also explain that the ethos of the academy is

much more positive and there is a greater level of respect between them and the staff. Students perceptively link their purposeful learning activities with the need to develop important life skills and now have much higher aspirations for the future. Consequently, they are more eager to attend the academy regularly because they feel that, in the students' own words, it has 'embraced their learning needs' and is helping them to 'flourish'.

The quality of leadership in and management of the academy

The principal, who has a proven track record in school improvement, is uncompromising in his drive to improve students' achievement and ensure that their successes are sustainable in order to maximise future opportunities. His vision for the academy is inspirational but he knows that this will take time to be fully reflected in all aspects of its work. Nevertheless, he has focused relentlessly on improving the quality of learning for the students by raising teachers' expectations and remodelling the curriculum to ensure that it provides relevant and exciting experiences. For example, the Year 7 curriculum helps them make links with life experiences beyond the school. This is well exemplified by their work on world literacy, in which the students considered whether 'charity begins at home'. This involved teams of students developing inventions to make life better for certain people in society. The most successful projects went forward to a Dragons' Den style final where the teams had to present their inventions and respond to probing questioning by the judges. As the principal explained to the local newspaper, 'I want more than just good exam results for our students. Good GCSEs are a passport for life, but the confidence, aspirations and wherewithal to use this passport is just as important to a young person.'

The academy has a good capacity to improve. Since its opening, it has been necessary for some difficult actions to be taken. However, a strong infrastructure is now in place and the impact of the extremely effective leadership is clearly seen in the improvements in attendance, behaviour, attainment and progress. There is a clearer understanding of the link between teachers' performance and their accountability for students' achievement. Rigorous systems to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching have had a demonstrable impact on improving it. Nevertheless, teachers are still more interested in the grade given to their teaching rather than the impact their teaching has over time on the students' learning. The principal, his new senior and middle leadership groups and the astute Academy Council have an accurate picture of the strengths and areas requiring development. Self-evaluation systems are embedded into the work of the academy and inform priorities with accuracy and purpose. Strategic planning is clear, targeted carefully, closely monitored and evaluated thoroughly. The members of the Academy Council are a highly experienced, confident and visionary group, who have managed change extremely well and have started to create a new culture of high aspirations and achievements. They are fully committed to improving the lives of the local community and the academy is part of that vision. Safeguarding arrangements meet current requirements securely.

External support

The quality of support from the Cabot Learning Federation is excellent and valued by the academy leaders. Resources and expertise are shared across the federation. For example, best practice is shared with Hans Price through the secondment of key personnel from other academies within the federation. The successful impact of this has been demonstrated well by the improved systems for analysing data and higher expectations for teaching and learning. Through regular reviews, discussions and observations, the executive principal, in conjunction with other principals within the Cabot Learning Federation, ensures that Hans Price receives exceptionally strong support and rigorous challenge. Weston College provides high quality professional expertise, particularly through the Chair of the Academy Council and in relation to financial advice and the construction of the new buildings. The University of the West of England plays a significant role in supporting the professional development of the staff. In conjunction with Rolls Royce, who provide work experience and attend careers fairs, their staff raise the aspirations of the students.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Provide more opportunities for students to be active participants in lessons and to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Increase opportunities for the higher attaining students to work independently.
- Help teachers to have a broader view of their teaching so that they have a better understanding of its impact on students' learning.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Chair of the Academic Council and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector