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Mrs Simpson
Executive Principal
Nottingham Academy
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Dear Mrs Simpson

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Nottingham Academy

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy on 8 March 2011 with Brian Cartwright HMI and Lindsay Hall Additional Inspector, 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 Chief Executive who represents the sponsor, the Chair of Nottingham Academy Council, a group of Year 11 students, and a number of senior leaders.

Context

The Nottingham Academy was formed in 2009 from the amalgamation of three schools: Greenwood Dale, a secondary school for 11-19 year olds, Elliot Durham, a secondary school for 11-16 year olds, and Jesse Boot, a primary school for 3-11 year olds. The three schools are now known in the academy as: Greenwood Road, Ransom Road, and Hereford Road. All three are currently on different sites with major refurbishment taking place at the Ransom Road site. It is anticipated that in September 2011 Greenwood Road and Hereford Road will move into a new building on the Hereford Road site with the current Greenwood Road site being used as a sixth form centre. There is an Executive Principal who has the overall responsibility

for leading and managing the academy with each site having a head of school. At the time of the monitoring visit, the Executive Principal was also the head of school at Greenwood Road but an appointment for a new head of school had been made the previous week. The academy has three specialisms which are literacy, mathematics and digital media.

The sponsor of the Nottingham Academy is the Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust which also sponsors two other academies. The Greenwood Academies Trust, accountable to the Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust, is responsible for managing and supporting the key operational functions of all of the Greenwood Dale sponsored academies. The Greenwood Academies Trust provides support for the Executive Principal and heads of school through what is known as the 'Central Team'. The Central Team is led by the Chief Executive who was previously the headteacher of Greenwood Dale School. The support given by the Central Team covers many of the key functions of each academy and includes support for developing literacy, mathematics, information and communication technology, finance, health and safety and staff professional development. Accountable to the Greenwood Academies Trust is the Nottingham Academy Council which undertakes general governance responsibilities.

Across the three sites, there are approximately 2,200 pupils. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is just over double the national average. Approximately half of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and there are just over a quarter of all pupils whose first language is not English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is approximately 45%, which is well above average.

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

The attainment of pupils by the end of Year 6 in the primary phase is well above national averages and continues to rise. Taking into account their starting points, pupils in the primary phase make outstanding progress. In lessons their progress was often outstanding reinforcing the historical evidence of outstanding achievement.

The overall attainment of the secondary students at the academy is above average. At Ransom Road, attainment is lower. Attainment of students at the two sites has improved since the formation of the academy. Attainment in English and mathematics at Key Stage 4 is lower than the national average overall but improving, and still represents good progress in these subjects. Students achieve particularly well in vocationally based subjects and this contributes to a strong sense of success for students, giving them the necessary qualifications to proceed successfully to level three courses in the future. The progress in lessons seen at Greenwood Road was generally good with some that was outstanding. At Ransom Road, the progress made by students in lessons seen was evenly split between

satisfactory and good. Progress over time is stronger, with assessment data and very recent examination results indicating that overall achievement of secondary students is outstanding. Last year, a group of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities did not achieve as well as expected, primarily because some college placements did not work as planned. That approach has subsequently been changed so that all students follow courses within the academy.

Standards in the sixth form vary depending on the courses studied. In vocational subjects, and applied A and AS level courses, attainment is above the national average. But at A level, standards are broadly in line with national averages. In 2010, this meant that progress in the vocational subjects was better than for most students nationally, but for A and AS level students, it was weaker than might be expected from their academic starting points.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Pupils' behaviour in the primary phase was outstanding. They were motivated and engaged in their work and worked cooperatively with each other. Pupils had pride in their work and wanted to do well. Students' behaviour at Greenwood Road was often outstanding. Despite an overcrowded site, students were always considerate to each other. Behaviour at Ransom Road has improved dramatically. Students and staff talk about how behaviour has been transformed. In lessons, students were always polite and willing to follow the teacher's instructions. In some lessons, their behaviour and attitudes about learning were good in that they were keen and eager to learn. Outside and in the dining hall, students' behaviour was outstanding and there was a real sense of calm and purpose around the site.

The number of exclusions in the secondary phase is very high but is on the decline. At Ransom Road, a coordinated approach to supporting those students who have been excluded on more than one occasion is developing replicating what takes place at Greenwood Road. Early signs are that this is having a very positive impact. There have been no exclusions in the primary phase.

Attendance at Hereford Road is good and average at Greenwood Road. Attendance at the Ransom Road site has improved in Years 7 and 8, but overall it is low. There are worrying levels of students who are persistently absent in Years 9 to 11. Since the academy opened, there has been no significant improvement in attendance in Years 9 to 11 and low levels of attendance continue to impact heavily on the standards students achieve.

The opportunities for student voice at Greenwood Road are well embedded and for primary pupils at the Hereford Road site there is school council for pupils. At Ransom Road, opportunities for students to share their views to help shape the work of the academy are very limited.

The effectiveness of provision

Almost all of the teaching observed in the primary phase was outstanding. Teachers' had high expectations and skilfully adapted their teaching throughout the lesson to meet the needs of all pupils. The use of assessment data on pupils' attainment and progress to inform teaching is a particular strength and it is not surprising that the outstanding practice is beginning to be shared across the academy as well as in other schools. In the lessons observed teachers expertly facilitated pupils' assessment of their own work and each others. Relationships between pupils and staff were outstanding.

The majority of teaching observed in the secondary phase at Greenwood Road was good or better. Teachers' expectations were high and relationships between students and staff were very good. The students' good and often outstanding attitudes to learning meant that even when teaching was satisfactory learning was good. Teaching was best when teachers instilled a good pace in the lesson, effectively used questions to probe students' understanding and provided practical learning opportunities.

There have been significant improvements to the quality of teaching at Ransom Road. Staff talk about a time when teaching was focused on controlling students' behaviour and compare that to now when teachers focus their efforts on helping students learn because they feel much more confident that students' behaviour has improved. For example, in a mathematics lesson, outstanding teaching resulted in two groups of students vigorously debating where to stand on a life-size set of axis laid out on the floor to represent the line $x=y$. Although there is still a high proportion of satisfactory teaching, an increasing proportion of good teaching is being observed by senior leaders as part of the rolling programme of lesson observations. Staff training has focused on what makes teaching and learning good and, as a result, teachers are beginning to give students more opportunities to take part in practical learning activities.

Although no inadequate teaching was observed, there were times when teaching was less effective. For example, in a few lessons teachers spent too long explaining activities to students or going over what they had done. In other lessons, teachers' expectations were not high enough and the activities they gave students were not practical enough to ensure they got enthusiastic about their learning.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The leadership team of the academy draws on the established experience of the Trust structure and particularly the support from the Central Team. The Executive Principal and the two established heads of school are all very effectively driving forward improvements. Following the setting up of the academy, there has been

much work to do to establish ways of working. Initially, the three sites operated independently as separate schools as they adjusted to the structure of the academy. In many ways, this was necessary as each school had very different issues to deal with. For example, Ransom Road started from a much lower base in terms of students' attainment, behaviour and the quality of teaching and learning. Since October 2010 the Executive Principal has coordinated a much more collaborative leadership approach involving senior leaders from all three sites in developing the distinguishing features of the academy. For example, senior leaders have worked together on improving literacy, teaching and learning and the use of data. Collaborative work has also involved secondary staff visiting the primary phase to observe good teaching practice. Pulling all of this work together is a detailed development plan.

Leaders and managers are acutely aware that standards need to be raised especially at the Ransom Road site. The Executive Principal oversees this work through regular meetings with the heads of school. The highly effective leadership of the academy has resulted in significant improvements to students' behaviour and the quality of teaching. In contrast, attendance has seen little improvement.

All three sites have robust monitoring systems and these are now being drawn together as a 'Monitoring schedule for self-evaluation and target setting'. The Executive Principal and a deputy headteacher from Ransom Road joined inspectors to observe teaching and demonstrated an accurate and insightful view of the quality of teaching. Performance management systems are robust and there is a very clear structure that ensures high levels of accountability.

The academy's specialisms are contributing positively to the curriculum at Greenwood Secondary where students achieve well in a number of related examinations and courses. The impact of the work to develop literacy and numeracy in the primary phase is a strength. The features of the specialisms are not embedded in curriculum at Ransom Road.

Safeguarding regulations and duties are met.

External support

The academy benefits from the support it receives from the Central Team. Regular visits from the School Improvement Partner have resulted in helpful evaluative reports.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust Chairman and the Academies Group at the Department for Education. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Cook
Her Majesty's Inspector