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Mr S Taylor
Bristol Metropolitan Academy
Snowdon Road
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Dear Mr Taylor

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Bristol Metropolitan Academy

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy on 18 May 2011 with Karl Sampson 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 students, parents, the Executive Principal, the Chair and members of the Academy Council and members of staff. At the invitation of the Principal they spoke to a representative of the local authority and the school improvement partner.

Context

Bristol Metropolitan Academy opened in September 2009 in fairly new, purpose built buildings which were constructed under the Building Schools for the Future initiative for the predecessor school, Bristol Metropolitan College. This had opened in September 2008 following the closure of Whitefield Fishponds Community School. Parents and carers, staff and students suggest that these schools were not well regarded in the local community.

The academy is part of the Cabot Learning Federation, which now consists of five academies in the Bristol area. An Executive Principal and Trust Board together lead the federation strategically, maintain financial control of the academies, offer centralised services in areas such as human resources and performance management, and quality assure the work of individual academy Principals. Staff at individual academies are also held to account and supported by local academy councils. These are made up of the Executive Principal, sponsor nominees and representatives from the staff, parents and carers, and the local community.

The Principal was appointed in March 2009. Almost all other staff of Bristol Metropolitan Academy in 2009 had taught in both the predecessor school and the school that preceded that. Staffing is generally stable but a recent restructuring of the senior leadership team will lead to significant changes at this level in September 2011.

The academy is structured around five learning zones: global understanding; enterprise; STEM (science and design and technology); performance and participation; and communication. In addition to delivering areas of the curriculum each zone is a base for a cohort of students, who, since September 2010 have been grouped into vertical learning families. The academy has specialist status in modern foreign languages. Since September 2010 the academy has had students in Year 12 who are the Bristol Metropolitan Academy cohort of the Cabot Learning Foundation sixth form. They attend courses delivered by all the academies in the federation.

There are 534 students currently on roll at the academy. Recruitment of students into Year 7 had declined but increased in 2010 and is set to increase very significantly in 2011. As a result, a high proportion of students attending the academy started after the beginning of Year 7. Around one third of students is eligible for free school meals and the deprivation indicator for the academy is high. A very high proportion of students are from minority ethnic groups. The largest of these is Black British – African but there are sizeable numbers of students of many different ethnicities. A very high proportion speaks English as an additional language and many of these are at an early stage of acquiring English. Around one quarter of students have special educational needs many of which are social, emotional and behavioural.

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

A wonderful purpose-built building, a smart new uniform and a structured working day underpin the new sense of self-belief, engagement and high aspirations of students at the academy. Students value the learning opportunities they now have: they are beginning to recognise that they can achieve highly and compete with the best. When teaching is good they respond readily and with enjoyment to the challenges presented to them. They are grateful for additional support and help with

their work that teachers are giving them. As a consequence, students are making much better progress than before.

Many students' prior attainment when they start at the academy is well below average. In general, the speaking and listening, the literacy and the numeracy skills of the student body remain below average. However, through concerted 'catch-up programmes' and careful intervention and support the academy has enabled many to make good and sometimes outstanding progress. The percentage of students getting five A* to C grades at GCSE, for example, has risen from 43% in 2009 to 83% in 2010. However, while there was improvement in the percentage of students who attained five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, from 29% in 2009 to 39% in 2010 this was less marked. This indicates that there is scope for further work to ensure that all students attain satisfactorily in these two very important subject areas. Furthermore, students with special educational needs in particular, but also those who are eligible for free school meals, are not making as good progress as others. At the moment students at the academy are not yet reaching levels of attainment that are in line with national averages. Looking at students' books it is clear that there remain weaknesses in the way students present their work and value their progress which have not been adequately addressed by teachers.

The data presented by the academy suggest that students in Year 12 are also making good progress. Students spoken to indicate that they are enjoying their courses and have secured good opportunities for Year 13.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students feel safe and well cared for at the academy. They and their parents agree that staff know them well and offer really great support when it is needed. One student acknowledged that when she was 'going through a rough patch', teachers helped her really well. Others speak highly of the support they have had with developing their reading and getting their coursework done. Students say that, because they are part of a vertical learning family, they know lots of older and younger students and feel very comfortable in the school. They know and accept the rules and are excited by the rewards that are on offer, each zone competing in a friendly manner to achieve them. Everyone is confident that bullying is not tolerated and that help is at hand if needed. The academy is a very inclusive environment. Different cultures are celebrated and many different languages used. Those students at an early stage of learning English are given a good grounding in a friendly environment. In some, but not enough, lessons teachers are very aware of their language needs, offering additional resources to help them access the learning well.

Academy staff have rightly directed a lot of energy into securing improved attendance by students. For most groups of students attendance is now good. However, students with special educational needs are missing far too much school.

The academy has very robust systems and procedures to manage student behaviour which are consistently applied and understood by all. As a result, the behaviour of students has improved markedly and there is much less poor behaviour in lessons and in breaks. The proportion of students who are excluded from the academy has dropped considerably. Students are developing a sense of pride in their academy: many volunteer to show visitors round and talk about their learning and life there. However, students are not yet empowered to play an active and responsible role either in their own learning or in the improvement of the academy. Year 12 students are conscious that they have needed a lot of help to adjust to the independence in learning that is demanded by sixth form courses.

The effectiveness of provision

Much of the best learning in the academy takes place as a result of intervention and support programmes and in small groups. Provision for students with special educational needs is good in these programmes, but is hampered by two things: first, the poor attendance of many and second, because provision for these students in mainstream lessons is not meeting their needs.

Students' behaviour in lessons is now sufficiently good that teachers could now offer more dynamic and active lessons in which students take greater responsibility for managing their own learning, but this is not yet widespread across the academy. Instead, while generally satisfactory, too many lessons are dominated by teachers talking, asking closed questions of the whole class and by teacher-directed short tasks. These techniques do not allow for the wide range of abilities in each group and do not promote students' understanding or allow them to develop their own ideas. Nor do they promote speaking and listening skills and basic literacy and numeracy as well as is needed. The best teaching seen was fast paced and demanding of students. Opportunities were given for them to construct theories and talk through their thinking with partners. Teachers helped promote understanding by asking open questions.

Teachers do not routinely explain clearly what students are to learn from an activity, and enable students to develop a view about what 'good' looks like. Similarly, teachers are not giving helpful feedback to students to promote their understanding of what their next steps should be or create a learning dialogue. Teachers do not use performance data or their own assessment of students' need to plan lessons that are tailored around these perhaps involving different activities for different students.

There were no appreciable differences in the quality of teaching in the sixth form compared with other year groups. Systems for quality assuring the teaching of Year 12 on sites other than their home site are not yet sufficiently robust.

The impact of the academy's specialism in modern foreign languages has been very good. All students take two foreign languages in Years 7 and 8 and they appreciate the wide and unusual range of languages they have the opportunity to learn. The academy's success at GCSE in languages is well above that achieved by students nationally. In addition to this, staff and students from the academy have done language work in local primary schools and the academy is taking an increasing role in developing language teaching in the local authority. Opportunities to play responsible roles beyond the academy, such as by teaching younger children, are beginning to inspire academy students.

The academy now tracks individual student performance effectively. Within each zone, a member of staff works highly effectively to ensure that students are given support to overcome barriers to their learning and to catch up. Increasingly, the impact of these intervention programmes, such as the reading programme and after school clubs, is assessed. A wide range of initiatives to ensure the care of students has been highly effective in terms of improvements in attendance, behaviour, ethos, engagement and the enjoyment of students. Parents and carers feel that the academy communicates with them well and seeks to work with them to help their children. Systems are in place to ensure that children who are in care are properly nurtured, but inspectors drew the attention of senior staff to one small area that had been overlooked.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The academy Principal has been highly effective in supporting his staff body through the change to become an academy. He and his leadership team have developed a shared understanding of objectives and a strong sense of teamwork and loyalty. Recently, with the Executive Principal, he has secured changes to the senior leadership team from September 2011 which will deliver cost efficiencies and additional impetus for change. The academy improvement plan is sharply focused on those things that will serve to raise standards and improve the quality of education. Parents are pleased that they have been involved in shaping the development of the academy and feel that communications between them and the academy are excellent. The academy's reputation in the community is rightly improving steadily.

Excellent structures and procedures have been established which have led to improvements in care, behaviour and attendance. There is great clarity about the different roles and responsibilities held by individual members of the academy team and there is remarkable consistency in delivery. This accounts for much of the success of the academy. There has been support for individual teachers, but insufficient leadership of teaching and assessment across the academy as a whole.

Middle managers have been supported to develop as leaders and their confidence and expertise has been well used. The performance management of individuals is

rigorous and well supported by the Executive Principal. However, academy leaders at all levels have not sharply focused on monitoring the impact of their work in terms of outcomes for students. In addition, they have not been wholly effective at driving improvement when they have monitored. In part this is because their judgements have been too generous. There is scope too for more in-depth analysis of student performance data, for example in relation to the performance of different groups, in order to gain insight into the impact of provision and determine future strategy. The academy council, which has begun to hold the academy to account in terms of broad outcomes, are also yet to develop this sharp focus.

External support

The Cabot Learning Federation has offered effective support through over-arching quality assurance activities. The Executive Principal takes a close interest in the provision offered by the academy and offers support and advice to the Principal, for example over the restructuring of the senior leadership team. Practical support has been supplied through teacher exchange and development programmes between academies and has included support from advanced skills teachers in both English and mathematics. This has served also to raise staff aspirations and expectations of their students. There has been careful induction of academy councillors and good links exist between them and the Trust Board. Opportunities for staff development across the federation have been welcomed. Further to the benefit of students, there have been managed moves between academies in the federation.

The local authority has continued to support the academy well and an officer of the authority sits on the academy council.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the pace and quality of learning by ensuring that
 - lessons are more strongly focussed on learning outcomes and that students are given clear direction about what they are trying to achieve
 - students are given opportunities to talk about their ideas and to drive their own learning
 - teachers assess students' work more effectively and give constructive feedback to students to help them take the next steps in their learning

- teachers use assessment information to tailor lessons to the needs of the individuals in each class.
- Improve the rigour, thoroughness and impact of self-evaluation by:
 - ensuring a strong and consistent focus on the outcomes of all aspects of the work of the academy
 - planning for and implementing careful monitoring of the outcomes of provision against targets at all levels of leadership within the academy
 - following up on the findings of such monitoring by introducing improvements
 - using assessment data strategically to influence classroom practice and hold teachers and students to account.

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

Yours sincerely

Emma Ing
Her Majesty's Inspector

Cc David Carter, Executive Principal and Chair of The Cabot Learning Federation Trust Board