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25 June 2009

Mr Peter Kennedy
Principal
The Belvedere Academy
17 Belvidere Road
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Dear Mr Kennedy

Academies initiative: monitoring visit to The Belvedere Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Peter Toft HMI to your academy on 23 and 24 June 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the first monitoring visit in connection with the academies initiative.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal and senior leadership team, the vice-chair of the local governing body, a group of middle leaders, various staff, groups of students and a colleague from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Telephone discussions were held with the acting chief executive of the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST) and the chair of the local governing body.

Context

Belvedere Academy opened in September 2007. Its predecessor, The Belvedere School, was a selective independent girl's school. It is located in the Princes Park area of Liverpool in buildings it has occupied since 1880. These have been extensively modified and expanded since that time and the site is currently undergoing further refurbishment and expansion. The academy's student roll is projected to expand to 810 girls between the ages of 11 and 19, including 250 in the sixth form. There has been extensive recruitment with about half of the current teaching staff appointed to the academy, including the principal and other senior leaders. In addition, a significant number of support staff has also been appointed.

The academy has two governing bodies, the Academy Trust Board and the local governing body. The academy is co-sponsored by the GDST and the HSBC Global Education Trust. It has specialisms in modern foreign languages and science. Almost one quarter of students are from minority ethnic communities with about half of this group speaking English as an additional language. A slightly lower than average proportion of students is entitled to free school meals and a similar percentage has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students in Years 11 and 13 were not present during the inspection.

Achievement and standards

Standards are well above average in the main academy and students make good progress. This is reflected in external examination grades, the academy's detailed assessment records and the work seen in the lessons observed. The attainment of students on entry to the academy has traditionally been high but it is changing. Students are increasingly admitted from a wider range of ability, including some who have not attained Level 4 in national tests at the end of their primary schooling.

Standards in the Key Stage 3 national tests and the GCSE examinations are significantly above average. In 2008, 96% of students attained five or more good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, with 58% being either A* or A. Challenging targets were exceeded.

Standards of attainment in the sixth form are very high and well above average. The proportion of students reaching the highest grades in GCSE examinations is also well above that seen nationally. In 2008, all students attained pass rates at A level in the A to E range and 74% achieved A or B passes.

There were, however, large differences in the proportion of students in Year 11 and 13 who attain A* or A grades between different subjects. Senior staff are taking appropriate and effective action within subject areas, including through improved assessment processes and the tracking of individual students' progress, to improve performance.

Personal development and well-being

Students' good attendance reflects their commitment to the academy and their enjoyment of what it provides. Senior leaders and staff have maintained a climate of high expectations while offering support so that students feel well cared for. This provides an excellent basis from which they can pursue their studies. Behaviour is very good; students demonstrate exemplary attitudes and application to their work. In corridor areas, mature behaviour reflects students' keen awareness of the needs and safety of others.

Students have good opportunities to develop responsibility and make a positive contribution through representation on the student council and by assisting younger students, for example by running enrichment activities for them. They consider their

views and opinions are valued and acted upon. Examples include their input into design matters with respect to the new buildings and their opinions about canteen facilities and menus. These factors combine to support the harmonious climate evident in the academy and contribute to the strong and positive relationships between staff and students.

Quality of provision

The large majority of lessons seen during the inspection were good with some outstanding practice evident in Year 10 and in the sixth form. Significant revisions to lesson planning and assessment procedures have combined effectively to produce well-planned, purposeful learning. Teachers' good subject knowledge is used effectively to provide stimulating activities which engage and interest students. Focused questioning by teachers provides the degree of challenge required for students to reflect upon their work and gain deeper insight into their studies. Teachers' marking ensures that students know how well they have done and how they can improve. This clarity contributes strongly to students' good progress. Students' commitment and application is first class. The majority consistently demonstrate responsibility for their own learning, working effectively with others when tasks are shared with some students showing genuine leadership qualities.

The academy has retained the effective academic and broad curriculum inherited from its predecessor school. This core provision remains in place while the curriculum is being expanded to ensure the needs of the wider ability range of students now being admitted to the academy are met. There is however, scope to improve the technological dimension of the curriculum to ensure that the interests and aspirations of all students are fully realised.

At Key Stage 3, all National Curriculum subjects are taught. Modern foreign language teaching has recently been extended to reflect the academy's specialism and this has been achieved by reducing time for technology for which facilities are limited. At Key Stage 4, an increasing range of GCSE subjects is offered with a strong core entitlement which includes modern foreign languages and separate science teaching. A wide range of interesting and intellectually challenging subjects is taught in the sixth form. This has recently been extended to include new subjects such as psychology and courses and activities in, for example, citizenship. Currently, this provision is entirely appropriate for the students on roll, though consideration is rightly being given to widening the curriculum further as the interests and abilities of students admitted to the sixth form change over time.

Throughout the academy the formal curriculum is supported by an excellent enrichment programme and well organised provision to promote students' personal and social development, alongside their capacity to live safely and healthily. These include courses in personal, social and health education together with a wide and growing range of activities which includes careers guidance, community enterprise and international experiences. Given the high standards attained in literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT); the widening

opportunities to understand the worlds of industry, commerce and government; and the clear self-confidence which students develop; preparation for employment, training or further study is excellent.

Students are given excellent care, guidance and support and staff go to great lengths to ensure that they maintain good progress. They develop into confident and articulate young women. This is a clear indication that the academy, like its predecessor school, is meeting its fundamental aim to inspire girls to high ambition and achievement. Safeguarding and risk assessment procedures are rigorously enforced and routinely updated. Staff invest significant time and effort in supporting students' pastoral welfare and students themselves value and recognise staffs' efforts on their behalf. Targets are challenging and accurately reflect prior learning and future potential. Students' progress is tracked in increasing detail. Regular assessments provide detailed evidence of progress. Well coordinated monitoring identifies underachievement and informs targeted support leading to improvement. While some staff are increasingly adept at evaluating students' progress in lessons and modifying ongoing learning to meet students' needs, this is not yet commonplace.

Leadership and management

The principal's highly effective and skilful leadership has successfully steered the academy through a challenging period of transition while retaining a resolute focus on the maintenance of high standards. He has received very effective support from the senior team. They demonstrate an incisive understanding of where improvement has occurred and offer a combination of drive and purpose in targeting those areas where further development is required. Collectively, they have enabled middle leaders to forge improvements in their own departments with clear accountability for performance. Evaluations carried out within subjects are rigorous, frank and thorough, often pointing the way for future developments.

Significant efforts to promote all aspects of community cohesion are evident in the broad range of study options available to students and the extensive opportunities to visit places locally, nationally and abroad. However, the academy is at an early stage of bringing these elements together into a coherent plan, although matters are in hand.

The academy's two governing bodies undertake different roles. The Academy Trust Board provides strategic direction and is the key decision-making body and the local governing body undertakes a monitoring function. The chair of the local governing body has membership of the Trust Board. Representatives from both forums demonstrate a clear understanding of the academy's performance and the challenges ahead, not least in the maintenance of high standards and ensuring that all students make progress commensurate with the capabilities and starting points. Representatives also recognise the need to ensure that local decision making becomes a stronger feature in the future and that local representation on the local governing body becomes a more prominent feature over time.

External support

There has been a shift in the type and range of support accessed as the academy has developed. Initially, this involved structural and procedural support from, for example, the GDST, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and Liverpool local authority as the academy was becoming established. As capacity has improved, effective external support has become focused on improvements to the quality of provision and maintaining high standards while equipping the staff with the skills necessary to cater for an increasingly diverse student body.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Improve higher grade examination performance at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form in those subjects where relative performance is lower.
- Strengthen the technological dimensions of the curriculum so that all students have an entitlement and a choice of study to meet their personal interests and ambitions.
- Improve the consistency with which teachers use ongoing assessment evidence to inform their lesson planning and the provision they make for all students.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chairs of the Academy Trust Board and the Local Governing Body, and the Academies Group at the DCSF. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tom Grieveson
Her Majesty's Inspector