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8 April 2011

Mr B Burke
Principal
Manchester Health Academy
Moor Road
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Dear Mr Burke

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Manchester Health Academy

Introduction

Following my visit with Angela Headon HMI to your academy on 6 and 7 April 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, the Chair of the Governing Body and representative of the academy's main sponsor, senior leaders, staff, and groups of students.

Context

Manchester Health Academy opened in September 2009, a year earlier than originally planned, in the predecessor school, with the new building opening in September 2010 on the same site. The main sponsor is The Central Manchester University Hospital National Health Service Foundation Trust. Manchester City Council and The Manchester College are co-sponsors. During its first 18 months the academy has experienced substantial reorganisation and some significant changes to staffing, although two thirds of the staff from the predecessor school remain in post. The academy has a specialism in health and sports science.

The academy provides a comprehensive education for 347 students, including 27 in the sixth form. The majority of students are White British and few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including the proportion with a statement of special education need is well above average.



Around half of the students are known to be eligible for free school meals. Students' prior attainment on entry to Year 7 is well below average.

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

The academy's first examination results, published in summer 2010, showed a significant rise in students' overall attainment and achievement. This reflects an improved provision that better meets their needs and which is enabling them quickly and securely to recover previous lost ground in their learning and progress. The proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, increased considerably compared to the 2009 results achieved by the predecessor school. The academy exceeded its target for this key indicator of achievement and narrowed markedly the attainment gap compared to the national average. However, the academy is aware that certain groups including some more-able and less-able students, particularly boys, made less than expected progress.

The academy's tracking data indicate that the gains secured so far will be built upon in 2011 with the majority of the current Year 11 on track to meet or exceed their targets. Indeed a significant number of A* to C grades in English, science and mathematics are already 'in the bag' due to successful early entries in those subjects. This positive picture is echoed in Years 7 to 10 where the academy's reliable assessment data show that most students are progressing satisfactorily towards their targets. Students were first admitted into the sixth form in September 2010. The latest internal assessment and monitoring information indicates that most of these students are also on track to reach their respective targets.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Staff and students state unequivocally that behaviour has improved immeasurably. A firmer stance, greater clarity about what is and what is not acceptable, together with a more coordinated approach to tackling the root causes of some students' poor behaviour are all making a difference. During the inspection students were polite, respectful and the large majority treated each other with care and consideration. This thoughtfulness extended to the academy's accommodation and resources. The Learners' Code is well understood and has brought greater consistency to behaviour management, although the point at which teachers judge it necessary to apply the sanctions varies. Exclusions and the number of behaviour referrals are also falling. However, there is a concern about the effectiveness of current measures to rehabilitate, and modify the behaviour of the small minority of students who flout academy rules repeatedly and/or present the most challenging behaviour.

Attendance is rising and the rate of persistent absence is falling as a result of the more-rigorous, effective and proactive strategies employed by the academy. They are taking a tough stance by issuing warning letters and penalty notices. A high-profile campaign across the academy to promote good attendance; increasing awareness among parents and carers of the negative impact regular absence can have on their children's education; and working closely with external agencies to ensure students' smooth reintegration, and/or arranging

bespoke provision to stimulate their increased attendance are also having a positive impact. For a number of students their rising attendance reflects their greater enjoyment of the educational experience the academy offers. Inspectors observed the vast majority of students arriving promptly at the start of the day.

The academy's specialism is high profile and makes a strong and wide-ranging contribution to raising standards and developing the academy as the hub of the local community. It is also helping to provide students with work-related learning and accreditation options; health promotion and sporting events in conjunction with key partners including the main and co-sponsors, and the Manchester United Foundation. Transition and learning links with primary schools are flourishing and have enabled the academy to strengthen its reputation locally.

The effectiveness of provision

Relationships between staff and students are good overall. Staff are hard working and enthusiastic and use their very good subject knowledge to plan lessons that students usually find challenging, stimulating and enjoyable. High staff expectations, and students' increasingly high aspirations, combine to produce a positive climate for learning with a good focus on acquiring, applying and consolidating students' knowledge, skills and understanding across a range of subjects. This is reinforced by apt guidance and support. As a result, the progress of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, has on the whole been accelerated. The remaining inconsistency slows the pace of learning. Students' literacy skills are not always well promoted in all subjects. In mixed-age classes the extent to which work is demanding or well matched to students' individual capabilities varies.

Students are set challenging targets which are reviewed regularly. Routine monitoring and evaluation of students' progress inform appropriate interventions to try and ensure no one falls behind. There are opportunities for self- and peer assessment but this is not consistently the case. Scrutiny of marking and feedback also indicates a degree of variability that the academy acknowledges needs ironing out. It is also clear that best practice is not always disseminated. Nevertheless, inspectors observed some very effective practice.

The curriculum is evolving to take better account of the needs, interests and ambitions of students. A focus on literacy and numeracy is paying dividends and is complemented by a wide-ranging offer including modern foreign languages. Key Stage 4 students welcome the range of pathways now available but some were left disappointed by the late withdrawal of diploma courses they had already started. An extensive enrichment and extended learning programme including leadership and accreditation opportunities supports students' personal development. The academy works in partnership with a range of agencies to provide academic and pastoral advice, guidance and support that is increasingly meeting students' varied needs. Students are convinced the help they receive has been pivotal in facilitating their improving outcomes, helping them to make informed choices about their futures and in some cases re-engaging them with formal education after extended periods away from it.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

The academy's leaders and managers are perceptive, decisive and strategic in their thinking and practice. They have worked shrewdly and effectively to embed ambition and drive improvement by frank and systematic monitoring, evaluation, and intervention in all aspects of the academy's work. The expectations of students and staff have been raised.

Responsibilities and structures have been rationalised and are clearly understood. Staff welcome these new ways of working buoyed by the discernable change in atmosphere, ethos, and culture in the academy which is challenging negative stereotypes and raising aspirations. The academy's aims, principles and vision are embedded and underpin students' rising achievement and the improving quality of provision. Development plans are specific, measurable and time-referenced with clear success criteria and evaluation cycles identified.

Senior leaders celebrate the academy's achievements to date but are not complacent. They rigorously hold staff to account and routinely challenge and support them to further improve the effectiveness of their work. Leaders have a realistic view of the academy's strengths and areas for further development which is helping them to target resources more efficiently. However, they are aware of the need to remove remaining inconsistencies and to enhance the impact of their work in identified areas if they are to ensure all students recognise, and reach their potential. Events have moved well in advance of anticipated timescales and at times senior leaders are so immersed in leading from the front that not every detail is always attended to. This is true of some policies and procedures which require further clarification and refinement to ensure they are in line with best practice guidance and the latest legislation. Nevertheless, there is compelling evidence that the academy has been successful in making and sustaining improvements and is well placed to continue doing so.

The collective expertise and experience of members of the governing body and the main and co-sponsors are helping to accelerate the academy's progress. Their education, business and training acumen has been instrumental in brokering partnerships and commissioning a range of human and physical resources that are widening the academic, vocational, sport and health-related opportunities available to students. It also supports the raising of standards. They have been influential in shaping the academy's strategic direction.

External support

The academy has several notable partners. These links have 'opened doors' and are raising the academy's kudos. Their involvement has led to enriched curriculum provision, coaching and mentoring, apprenticeships and work placements. Helpful guidance has been provided by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. The School Improvement Partner is monitoring and critically evaluating the effectiveness of the academy's work regularly.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to raise all students' attainment, particularly among groups not performing as strongly as their peers do nationally by:
 - giving students greater opportunities to develop, apply and reinforce their literacy skills across subjects.
- Further improve the impact of teaching on students' learning and progress so that it is consistently good throughout the academy by ensuring:
 - staff always deliver high quality lessons which challenge and engage all students, and focus sharply on promoting learning, deepening understanding and extending students' skills.
- Further increase the impact of behaviour and attendance improvement strategies.
- Ensure that all policies, procedures and requirements are robust, embedded and are consistently in line with the latest guidance, legislation and best practice.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of 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

John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector

Cc chair of governors
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