

10 June 2011

Mrs G Pollard
Principal
De Warenne Academy
Gardens Lane
Conisbrough
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN12 3JY

Dear Mrs Pollard,

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to De Warenne Academy

Introduction

Following my visit to your academy with Katrina Gueli HMI on 8 and 9 June 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, had a telephone conversation with the School Improvement Partner and met with the Principal, members of the senior and middle leadership teams, groups of students, members of the governing body and a representative of the Trust.

Context

The Principal was deputy headteacher at the predecessor school and the acting headteacher throughout 2008/09. When the academy opened in September 2009 there were 12 vacant posts, including three at senior leadership level. Appointments have been made over the last two years and vacancies filled but a number of staff have also left the academy. Eight new teachers are starting in September. The academy has experienced difficulty attracting mathematics teachers but the department will be fully staffed from the start of next term. Plans for a new building were postponed when Building Schools for the Future funding was withdrawn but a new building is now scheduled to open in the spring term of 2013. The academy is sponsored by the School Partnership Trust.

The academy has 640 students on roll, including 31 in the sixth form. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than average. Most students

are White British and very few are from minority ethnic groups or have a first language that is not English. The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average but slightly fewer than average have a statement of special educational needs. The academy has specialisms in English and applied learning.

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

Attainment is rising. In 2010, the proportion of Year 11 students achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C increased by 24 percentage points and narrowed the gap with the national average. The proportion of students obtaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, also increased markedly. Based on the results of early entry GCSE examinations and internal tracking data, a more dramatic rise in attainment is expected this year. Overall, Year 11 students in 2010 had made the progress expected across Key Stages 3 and 4. However, one group, those students with additional needs deemed to require support at the school action plus level, made slow progress and achieved few qualifications. The academy has taken effective action to rectify this and similar students are making much better progress this year. Internal tracking data indicate the achievement of students in Key Stage 3 is also much better this year than last.

Progress in the lessons observed was mostly good but varied with the quality of teaching. In stronger lessons students participated well and clearly enjoyed their learning but in the weaker lessons students were passive and not always fully engaged. Aspirations are rising across the academy and many more students are applying to study in the sixth form. The proportion of students leaving the academy and not progressing to further education, employment or training has declined rapidly and is low.

Other relevant student outcomes

Attendance was low but is now average and improving. The number of persistent absentees has dropped markedly and is in line with the national average. Attendance patterns are studied very closely and swift remedial action is taken when necessary. Links between home and the academy are much stronger and are supporting the improvement. Initiatives for students, such as a weekly draw are encouraging better attendance. Improving behaviour has been a major priority for the academy and initiatives have been very successful. Students say the improvement is remarkable and they are very proud of what has been achieved. Clearer expectations, consistent application of the behaviour policy, effective interventions and a more appropriate curriculum have all been key factors in bringing about improvement. The number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen dramatically and misdemeanours are becoming less serious.

The effectiveness of provision

The academy has been very successful in reducing the high proportion of inadequate teaching and this has been accompanied by a gradual improvement in the amount of good

teaching. The lesson observation system is robust and leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching. In better lessons, teachers plan a variety of interesting tasks that match the needs of everyone in the class, students are given plenty opportunities to apply and practise their skills and they respond by showing a lively interest. Teachers make regular checks on learning and skilled questioning is used very effectively to probe understanding, tease out misconceptions and challenge thinking. However, in weaker lessons, teachers talk for too long and opportunities for discussion are missed. Activities fail to engage students, they remain passive and enjoyment is limited.

The curriculum has been improved and meets students' needs and aspirations more effectively. The applied learning specialism is having a positive impact by increasing students' motivation and achievement through a wider range of vocational courses. The English specialism is enabling the academy to help students in Key Stage 3 with low literacy levels to improve their skills quickly. This helps the students to make better progress in English and also enables them to approach other subjects with more confidence. A growing range of enrichment activities is helping accelerate students' progress and personal development. The successful introduction of the sixth form last year opened up new progression routes for students and the academy is offering a much wider range of post-16 courses in September as a result of working in partnership with other schools in the Trust.

Care, guidance and support are increasingly strong. More coherent systems ensure better communication between teaching and support teams, leading to earlier identification of students needing extra help. Stronger links with parents and carers and more effective support for both students and their families are contributing to improved attendance and behaviour. Bespoke packages of support and closer links with relevant external agencies are ensuring that the needs of those individuals whose circumstances make them especially vulnerable are increasingly well met.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

Leaders and managers have been very successful in changing the culture of the academy and improving outcomes for students. Links with partner primary schools, the local community and parents and carers are much stronger and the academy's reputation is growing. Students are justifiably proud of being part of the academy's development and there is a growing confidence and self-belief.

The Principal provides very strong leadership. She steered the predecessor school through preparation for academy status very well with a depleted leadership team. She has a very clear vision for the academy and plans for development are ambitious, clearly prioritised and well-staged. She has built a strong senior leadership team by mixing promising leaders from the predecessor school with talented leaders recruited from elsewhere. The middle leadership team is developing well and taking increasing responsibility for driving the improvement agenda. There are much clearer lines of accountability especially for pastoral staff. Governance is much stronger with a streamlined committee structure. The governing body has a good blend of expertise and includes new members as well as some from the

predecessor school. They have the necessary skills and expertise to understand and pursue issues and are not afraid to challenge senior leaders when appropriate. The Chair of the Governing Body has a high profile around the academy and often joins senior leaders as they meet students, parents and carers 'at the gate' each morning and evening.

New data and reporting systems are playing a major role in improving achievement. Leaders have good access to clear reports that are used to analyse the progress of individuals, teaching groups and other specific groups of students. The reports are used well to target interventions more quickly and accurately. The very clever deployment of teachers and the skilful matching of examination boards to students' needs are also playing a key part in raising attainment. Leaders have a good grasp of the academy's strengths and areas for further improvement and they are prepared to make tough decisions if necessary. The academy's capacity for improvement is good and improving.

External support

The academy receives very good support from the Trust focused on building capacity. Expert advice is readily available to the governing body and leaders, many of whom are new to their roles, as they develop and implement new systems specifically tailored to the needs of De Warenne. By providing central services, such as finance and human resources, the Trust has freed leaders to focus on the key priorities of improving outcomes and provision for students. The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust has given good support by funding curriculum team professional development, providing middle leadership training and offering wide networking opportunities. The School Improvement Partner has also provided good support and his advice on the use of data is particularly valued.

Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching.
- Ensure that all students play an active part in their learning.

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

Jan Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc

Chair of the Governing Body
the Academies Group, DCSF [Paul.hann@dcf.gsi.gov.uk]