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Mr N Blundell
Principal
Bristol Cathedral Choir School
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Dear Mr Blundell

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Bristol Cathedral Choir School

Introduction

Following my visit with Christopher Nye HMI to your academy on 7 – 8 October 2009, 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, governors, staff and students.

Context

Bristol Cathedral Choir School opened in September 2008 in the same accommodation as its predecessor school; a building programme is due for completion by September 2011. The academy's specialisms are in music and mathematics. The current principal took up post in November 2008.

There are currently 496 students on roll. While the number of students in Years 9 - 13 is small, Years 7 and 8 are full. The proportions of students from minority ethnic groups or with home languages other than English are small. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is close to the national average. Few



students leave the academy other than at the end of Years 11 and 13. Staff turnover is also very low.

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

Standards of attainment are high. Early analysis of the academy's 2009 GCSE results indicates that these students made good progress given their starting points at the end of Year 6. Early analysis of the 2009 A Level results indicates that upper and middle ability students met or exceeded their target grades, but that some students with lower GCSE grades did not. Students currently in Year 13 are on track to achieve more.

Students were making good progress in the lessons observed during the inspection; all groups were progressing well. This good progress is supported by a sharp focus by teachers on developing students' key subject knowledge and understanding. Students enjoy lessons, although they say that they find a small number of lessons dull because activities lack variety or are uninteresting.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students are polite, friendly and helpful, and have positive attitudes to school. They behave well in lessons and around the academy, although there is occasionally some minor misbehaviour when teaching is less effective. Students say that they feel safe, that bullying is rarely an issue and that students from different year groups get on very well together. Attendance has improved in the last year and is above the national average; students arrive punctually. The academy provides a wide range of opportunities to support students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There has, for example, been a significant increase in the number of students participating in musical activities in the past year.

The effectiveness of provision

Students are well taught. Senior leaders have worked hard to eradicate any unsatisfactory teaching and to raise the overall quality of lessons. The large majority of lessons are now good and a small number are outstanding.

Particular strengths in lessons include teachers' excellent subject knowledge, rigorous teaching of key knowledge and understanding, and a sharp focus on ensuring that older students understand the requirements of GCSE and A Level examinations. Classroom relationships are extremely positive and teachers generally manage behaviour very well. However, in many cases teachers do not check students' learning as the lesson progresses. Lessons are also not always planned to meet the precise needs of students of different abilities, and a few lessons move at too slow a pace to engage and interest all students fully.



The development of the academy's specialisms has been affected by changes in staffing in the music department. The focus over the past year has rightly been on strengthening music as a school subject: provision and examination results have improved significantly and a number of useful external links are developing quickly. Thorough and sensible plans are in place to support further development.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The principal is providing the academy with a very clear direction and drive – much has been achieved in the past year. The transition to academy status has been well managed and staff morale is high. Decisions about priorities and the pace of change have been intelligent and very well-considered. This is helping to ensure that the academy's improvement is sustainable and well embedded. Senior leaders form a strong and effective team, and governors provide them with considerable support and challenge. Both governors and senior leaders have a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the academy's strengths and areas for development. The work of each faculty has been rigorously reviewed in the past year and clear points for development have been identified. Much good work is being done to develop the quality of leadership across the academy, enabling middle leaders to make an increasing contribution to the academy's development.

The focus in the past year has been on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The monitoring of lessons is rigorous and regular, and a range of strategies are in place to develop teaching and learning further. Of the 19 lessons observed by inspectors, 15 were observed jointly with a member of the senior team. In each case, judgements made by senior leaders matched those of inspectors very closely.

Systems to set targets for students and measure their achievement are developing. While there is good practice in some areas, systems are not yet fully established or coordinated across the academy. Leaders appreciate that this is an important area for improvement.

All safeguarding procedures are in place and rigorously applied; policies are clear, well understood by staff and reviewed annually. Although students have to cross a public road to move between the academy's two buildings, staff are mindful of the risk that this entails and work hard to minimise it, for example by providing close staff supervision.

External support

Leaders are making good use of help and support from a range of sources. These include a number of useful links with local schools and a close relationship with the local authority.



Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

Priorities for further improvement

- Develop more extensive systems to track and monitor students' academic progress. Ensure that full use is made of this information:
 - when teachers plan their lessons, so that activities meet the needs of students of different abilities more closely
 - to track the progress of different groups more rigorously to identify potential underachievement
 - to sharpen the way in which middle leaders and teachers are held accountable for students' progress and achievement.
- Ensure that teachers check students' learning more carefully to evaluate their progress towards the lesson's intended outcomes.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Academies Group at the Department for Children, Schools and Families. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Russell
Her Majesty's Inspector