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11 March 2011

Mrs Annette Hall  
Principal  
Leeds West Academy  
Calverley Lane  
Bramley  
Leeds  
LS13 1AH

Dear Mrs Hall

## **Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Leeds West Academy**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Bernard Campbell HMI, to your academy on 9 and 10 March 2011, 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, held a telephone conversation with the School Improvement Partner and met with the Principal, members of the senior leadership team, groups of students, two governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the sponsors. They also observed 20 lessons taught by different teachers.

### **Context**

Since the academy opened there have been many changes to staffing. The Principal was headteacher of the predecessor school but the executive leadership group includes only one other member of the previous senior leadership team. The turnover of teaching staff at the transition point was high and 20 new teachers were appointed; many newly qualified or in their early years of teaching. Although the academy has had difficulty with the leadership and staffing of mathematics, new teachers have been appointed recently but have yet to take up post. The academy is sponsored by E-ACT.

The academy has 934 students on roll, including 144 in the sixth form. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is more than twice the national average.

January 2011



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Most students are White British and very few speak English as an additional language. The number of students with a statement of special educational needs is low but around half of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities which is well above average. The new academy building is scheduled to open in September 2011. The academy has specialisms in performing arts and English.

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

The academy's first published performance data show a considerable improvement in GCSE results. The proportion of students gaining five or more A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics, rose markedly and, although attainment is still low, it is getting closer to the national average. Early GCSE results for current Year 11 students suggest that the rapid rate of improvement will continue. The improvement in English has been dramatic but mathematics is improving more slowly. Statistical analysis shows that students' progress is much better than in the predecessor school and now compares very favourably with similar schools. In 2010, the majority of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities made good progress. However, one particular group, the School Action Plus students, did not do as well as similar students nationally; action has been taken to address this. Internal tracking data show a marked improvement in students' performance in Key Stage 3. In 2010, students made satisfactory progress in the sixth form but gained fewer qualifications than average.

Enjoyment of learning increases as the quality of teaching improves. Students are positive about the leadership provided by the headteacher and are motivated by the personal interest she and other staff show in their welfare and progress. They feel challenged to achieve further and are focused on gaining higher grades. Students made good or better progress in around half the lessons observed and satisfactory progress in the remainder. In the better lessons, students showed a lively interest and learning proceeded at a fast pace but in the less effective lessons, students were more passive. Students' enjoyment of learning is supported very well through very high levels of participation in enrichment activities, clubs and visits. Students are very positive about the opportunities offered by the academy and take increasing pleasure and pride in its growing reputation.

### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

Students' behaviour has improved. They have much better relationships with staff and most behave well both in and out of lessons. There are still a small number of students with challenging behaviour, particularly in the older age groups and there is a higher level of misbehaviour in mathematics than in other lessons. The number of fixed term exclusions has been greatly reduced this year compared to last.

Attendance has improved this year. For example, the attendance rate in Years 7 and 8 is five percentage points higher than at this time last year. However, strategies to improve attendance did not get fully underway until partway through last year and attendance in 2009/10 was low as a result. Attendance in the sixth form is not improving as quickly.

Persistent absence was high in the first year of the academy but has been halved during the current year. Punctuality is also better this year than last.

### **The effectiveness of provision**

The quality of teaching has improved partly as a result of the appointment of many new staff and also as a result of intensive training. Development strategies have brought about improvements in matching activities to students' needs and in the use of written feedback. Teaching is stronger in the academy's specialist subjects of performing arts and English and is weaker in mathematics. Teachers consistently use lesson objectives and assessment criteria to provide good guidance about what is to be learnt. Teaching frequently makes good use of mini-whiteboards to enable students to communicate their ideas and understanding. In the best lessons, teachers conduct highly productive classroom dialogue and use questioning precisely to extend learning. In weaker lessons, classroom management is less effective and students talk over the teacher or respond slowly to requests. In a few lessons teachers take too long to explain the objectives and assessment criteria getting the lesson off to a slow start. Teaching assistants are not always deployed effectively in lessons and lack focus.

Increasing opportunities to take practical subjects that match the aspirations and interests of students have contributed to improving attainment and attendance. For example, a group of students who were taught off-site and underperformed markedly last year are now entered for and achieving GCSEs in English and mathematics and they are gaining more qualifications overall. GCSE courses in modern and foreign languages have been re-established. Performing arts and English make a significant contribution to students' success. The enrichment programme has started successfully and includes popular activity weeks that have given students new learning experiences and responsibilities. These have been less popular with sixth form students and the academy has taken steps to overcome this. In the first year of the academy the range of subjects in the sixth form was narrow and students took too few courses. A broader offer and higher expectations have led to students taking more courses this year. Plans for the addition of a more academic A-level pathway are in place and supported by the offer of bursaries.

The quality of care, guidance and support has been considerably improved. Students say the introduction of small coaching groups makes them feel well supported and increases their feeling of belonging. Provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities has been reviewed and strengthened this year. The management of the learning centre for internal exclusion is much improved and is a key factor in the reduction of fixed term exclusions. The new rewards system coupled with home visits and court action have successfully communicated to parents, carers and students the importance the academy places on good attendance. Leaders analyse attendance data more systematically and introduce well-targeted action promptly. The academy is at an earlier stage of adapting and applying these strategies in the sixth form.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers**

The Principal provides very dynamic and highly effective leadership and is supported very well by a team of talented and energetic senior leaders. They are very ambitious for the academy and relentless in their drive for improvement. Self-evaluation is accurate and links closely to the development plan. Both are very clear, used well and fundamental to moving the academy forward at a fast pace. Leaders are extremely quick to pinpoint and address any emerging issues. Data systems are much improved and used well. Leadership is becoming more dispersed which has resulted in middle leaders rising to the challenge of being made more accountable, and pastoral and academic managers working more closely together for the benefit of students.

The Principal has developed a very innovative vision for the academy that is well understood and supported. Plans were carefully researched and the new building designed around an innovative and inspirational delivery model that has captured the imagination of staff and students. Some plans have already been introduced successfully. The governing body has an impressive range of skills and knows the academy very well. They use their insight to challenge senior leaders when necessary and their expertise to give valuable support. Links with parents have been strengthened through consultations about the academy's development and the introduction of parents' panels. 'Meet your coach days' are very well attended. The academy has moved from a position of seeking out good practice in other institutions to offering help and sharing best practice with others.

## **External support**

The academy receives very good support from its School Improvement Partner through monitoring visits and regular help with training and development. The monitoring and support from the E-ACT adviser is very helpful as are the networking opportunities and conferences offered by the trust. The partnership with Macmillan Academy in Middlesbrough brings many opportunities including joint training. The relationship with Leeds Metropolitan University is also developing and brings increasing benefits.

## **Main Judgements**

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

## **Priorities for further improvement**

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in satisfactory lessons by:
  - making more effective use of teaching assistants
  - more assertive classroom management especially in mathematics
  - speeding up the explanation of criteria and objectives at the start of lessons.
  
- Increase the progress that students make in mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Jan Bennett  
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc Tom Peryer, Chair of the Governing Body  
The Academies Group, DfE [[Paul.hann@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.hann@education.gsi.gov.uk) ]