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17 December 2008

Ms Annie Blackmore  
Acting Principal  
The Bridge Academy Hackney  
Laburnum Street  
Hackney  
London  
E2 8BA

Dear Ms Blackmore

Academies initiative: monitoring visit to The Bridge Academy Hackney

## Introduction

Following my visit with Robert Ellis HMI to your academy on 9 and 10 December 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

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

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting principal, key members of staff, groups of pupils, two governors who also represented the academy's sponsor and held a telephone conversation with the school improvement partner.

## Context

The Bridge Academy, Hackney is a mixed, non-denominational school for 11-18 year olds, which opened as a new school in September 2007. It has specialisms of music and mathematics. In September 2008 it moved to purpose built accommodation on the site of the former Laburnum Primary School, Laburnum Street, South Hackney. At the moment it has only Year 7 and Year 8 students with the number on roll being 374, but by 2013 it is expected to have 1,150 students including 250 students in the sixth form. Over half the students come from minority ethnic backgrounds and around two in five have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including 6% who

have statements of special educational needs. Both these figures are well above the national average. The academy has experienced difficulty in recruiting staff in design and technology. The Principal is on maternity leave and the academy is being led by an acting principal.

### Achievement and standards

Overall students' academic progress is satisfactory. In the core subjects, assessment records for the last academic year indicate that in science progress is good, and satisfactory in English and mathematics. In music and modern foreign languages, students made outstanding progress. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are making more limited progress. A high proportion of those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties are not making enough progress in mathematics or English.

The work seen in lessons and exercise books showed satisfactory progress overall, but this is inconsistent across the academy. Where teaching was good, students reported that they made good progress, and they were very proud to show their own records that demonstrated their improvement. However, in other lessons, students were unclear about how well they were performing and although they were enjoying their learning, showed a lack of pride in their work.

Systems for tracking the progress of individual groups of students are at an early stage of development. Although data are collected regularly from staff and teachers have access to central records, analysis of the data is limited and is not yet being used effectively to identify priorities.

### Personal development and well-being

Most students are proud of the academy and behave well so that classrooms and public spaces are generally calm and orderly. However, a small but significant minority are less motivated and need considerable prompting from staff to remind them about how they should conduct themselves. Exclusion rates have been reducing and most students respond appropriately to the range of rewards and sanctions that are available. Students report that low-level inappropriate behaviour and inattentiveness sometimes has a negative impact on learning and that the staff's response to poor behaviour is not entirely consistent. Students attend well and are usually punctual at the start of the day. They report that the atmosphere amongst students is very cooperative and friendly so they feel safe in the academy. They are confident that staff will sort out any bullying issues and that there is someone to go to if they have a problem.

Students show a very good understanding of the need to maintain a healthy life style, with a very high proportion taking part in the very wide range of sports activities provided outside the school day. The majority of students take advantage of the high quality meals service. Students have good social skills, and are able to express their opinions confidently when discussion is managed well by the teacher,

but are not always good at listening to one another when the atmosphere is less formal.

### Quality of provision

In the majority of lessons seen during this inspection, the quality of teaching was satisfactory, but considerable variation is evident across the academy, and this is reflected in the progress that students make. During the visit, eleven parts of lessons were observed, one was outstanding, two were good, seven were satisfactory and one was inadequate. In the lessons that were good or better, work was carefully matched to students' needs, the pace was brisk, expectations were high and students were enthusiastic and responded well to the challenges provided. As a result, behaviour was good and there was a strong focus on the quality of students' learning, not just the quality of teaching. At the beginning of these lessons, students knew not only what they were going to learn but also how their learning would be assessed. However, in the satisfactory lessons, planning did not take sufficient account of the individual learning needs of students or their different starting points. Teachers did not always have appropriate strategies for managing the behaviour of a small minority of students who found it difficult to engage with the lesson. The pace was sometimes slow and students were not always actively involved but were passive. The quality of marking and feedback to students was also linked closely to the quality of teaching. In satisfactory lessons, students did not know what they needed to do in order to improve. Often, when advice was given, it was generic and not sufficiently subject specific.

The academy has introduced a system of regular monitoring of teaching and learning, and is aware of the variability across the academy. Heads of department, most of whom have been in post since the academy opened, share their good practice in order to develop consistent systems, for example for tracking achievement.

A creative model to extend the curriculum in Key Stage 3 is appreciated very much by students. On Fridays the timetable is suspended to allow longer periods of focused work on topics that allow a more integrated approach between subjects. Students enjoy these days very much, particularly when they have the opportunity to go on trips and to work on longer projects, for example in music. They also value the fact that the academy's sponsors make provision for everyone to learn to play a musical instrument, and have enjoyed performing in public. The music curriculum also encourages students to develop a deeper understanding of their own culture and to learn about the influences of other cultures. Links through the school's mathematics specialism to Queen Mary's College, such as the recent Hackney Maths Challenge, have the potential to engage all students in raising their enthusiasm for and achievement in mathematics. The range of sports offered within the curriculum is extensive, including for example, canoeing on the Regent's Canal and swimming at London Fields lido.

Students feel that they are well supported and cared for, and were particularly complimentary about the transition from primary school to the academy. The acting principal ensures that she knows all students by inviting groups to tea each week to celebrate their achievements. Appropriate intervention is in place for some students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but individual strategies to support those whose needs may not be quite so serious, both for learning and behaviour, are not easily available to staff for use in classrooms. The management of the few serious behavioural problems is effective, and has recently involved a newly set up Governors' behaviour panel.

Thorough and robust systems for safeguarding students are in place.

#### Leadership and management

Since November 2007, just after the academy opened, the acting principal has led the academy effectively, although for two terms she was without a vice-principal to support her. She has successfully managed the transfer to the new building and has put in place systems to ensure that the academy runs smoothly. Although there have been difficulties with recruitment, especially in design and technology and a special needs coordinator, the academy now has a full complement of staff, who are working together well as a team, particularly at middle management level.

The temporary nature of the acting principal post has meant that the main focus of the senior leadership team has been on the smooth day-to-day running of the academy and strategic planning has been limited. However, senior leaders are aware of areas that need development, and have for example, put in place external support to help identify strategies for supporting students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Middle managers are developing into an effective team with a focus on the quality of teaching and learning. However, as the leadership team readjusts to the return of the substantive principal and the departure of the temporary vice-principal, the governors will need to ensure that the leadership team has sufficient capacity to implement further development.

Target setting is inconsistent. Although it is based on increasingly secure assessment information it does not ensure that all students achieve as well as they might.

Good links exist with outside agencies to support learning and the local community are encouraged to engage with the school.

#### External support

The academy makes good use of support from a wide range of sources. The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust has recently carried out a review of teaching and learning and has provided useful staff development. The academy also works closely with Hackney Learning Trust. The sponsors' links within the fields of the two specialisms are already beginning to show benefits to students' involvement and

commitment to mathematics and music. Volunteers from the sponsor are providing useful one-to-one support in mathematics and literacy for some students.

#### Main Judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that teaching strategies are matched effectively to the needs of individual students with learning or behavioural difficulties.
- Ensure that leadership and management at all levels is as effective as possible.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Academies Group at the DCSF.

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey  
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc chair of governors  
the Academies Group, DCSF [ [Paul.hann@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.hann@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk) ]