

Suite 22 West  
Lancs  
Investment Centre  
Maple View  
Skelmersdale  
WN8 9TG

T 0300 1231231  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Direct T 01695 566930  
Direct F 01695 729320

13 May 2010

Mr Showkat Badat  
Principal  
Essa Academy  
Lever Edge Lane  
Bolton  
Greater Manchester  
BL3 3HH

Dear Mr Badat

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Essa Academy

## Introduction

Following my visit with John Rutherford HMI to your academy on 11 and 12 May 2010, 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, senior leaders, a group of subject leaders, groups of students, the Chair and other representatives of the governing body, representatives of the sponsors and a representative of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

## Context

The academy opened in January 2009. The Essa Foundation, a charitable trust, sponsors the academy in partnership with Bolton Council. Around one third of students are from Indian heritage and a quarter from Pakistani heritage. A small minority of students are of African heritage with a similar proportion from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average, although the proportion identified as having

special educational needs and/or disabilities is high. The academy is smaller than an average secondary school, with 813 students on roll. Work for the new academy building began in April 2010 on land adjacent to the present site. The new building is scheduled to open in October 2011.

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

In 2009 the proportion of 16-year-olds attaining five A\* to C grades including English and mathematics, while well below average, exceeded the target set by the predecessor school. The academy's own assessment information shows that this year they are on track comfortably to meet targets set for 2010. The academy's data also shows that actions to counter the underachievement of White British students and those known to be eligible for free school meals have had some impact in narrowing the achievement gap for these groups. A stronger emphasis on the completion of coursework, earlier identification of underachievement linked to appropriate intervention and a more personalised approach to examination entry have contributed to raising attainment. However, activities which meet the needs of all students well are not a strong feature of day-to-day teaching in mainstream classes, so progress in learning is often satisfactory rather than good. Students' good behaviour in lessons and constructive relationships with their teachers and peers, and developments in the use of information and communication technology to support learning contribute to their enjoyment.

### Other relevant outcomes for students

Students say that they greatly enjoy coming to the academy. This is reflected in good improvements in attendance. Punctuality at the start of the day is monitored carefully and also shows an improving trend. Where they occur, opportunities to work independently and collaboratively in groups contribute well to students' learning and progress. In many lessons, particularly those planned to include cross-curricular themes, students show enthusiasm for learning new skills and knowledge. They particularly enjoy being involved in work where they can relate well to the context, for example planning a conference about rainforests. Through such activities students are improving their speaking and listening skills.

Harmonious relationships are evident between all groups of students and adults. Students report that this has been the greatest change brought by the academy and it is reflected in their behaviour in social areas outside lessons. The percentage of students excluded from the academy has fallen considerably. Students report that one of the most important reasons for their better attitudes and behaviour is the increasing responsibility and trust given to them by adults. Support and guidance for students at risk of exclusion has a positive impact on the majority of those who receive it.

Students have been involved significantly in the design of the new building, the appointment of new staff, the academy's curriculum and the choice of uniform. They value such opportunities to make a positive contribution to their community. In some cases, their views have taken precedence when they have differed from those of school leaders. Students make a strong contribution to the community beyond the school, for example organising a conference of students from other schools on community cohesion and how it can be improved. The academy has made satisfactory progress in improving outcomes for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for those who speak English as an additional language. Much of the work responsible for this improvement has been introduced recently as the academy works to develop more effective methods for the early identification and assessment of needs and for planning suitable support.

### The effectiveness of provision

Inspectors observed 18 lessons. The progress students made in their learning was good in five, satisfactory in nine and inadequate in four lessons. Inspectors found a smaller proportion of teaching to be good in this sample than the academy's own records suggest. In the large majority of lessons teachers have established good relationships founded on mutual respect and students behave well. Students value the iPods provided by the academy as a tool to support learning. Inspectors observed instances of these being used to good effect, for example to check the meaning of a new word, to translate into a students' home language, to email an answer to a teacher and to quickly access the periodic table. Frequently, however, teaching takes insufficient account of the different needs and abilities of individuals. Similarly, the effective use of strategies to check that learning is taking place and to gauge the rate of individuals' progress is generally underdeveloped. These weaknesses, despite the evident and good improvements elsewhere, have the potential to slow the rate of future progress in the journey to raise attainment.

The curriculum is developing well. New courses planned for September offer greater choice still for differing needs and interests. In particular, the innovative 'new basics' curriculum with its strong emphasis on personal and social development, is proving effective in meeting the learning needs of Year 7 students. Students feel confident that they can discuss any concerns with a trusted adult and will receive valuable support. A number of potentially vulnerable students who have recently started at the academy reported how staff helped them to settle in quickly, become 'part of the family' and take advantage of all that the academy has to offer.

### The effectiveness of leadership and management

The Principal provides good leadership and a clear direction to the work of the academy. He has been highly influential in creating an inclusive ethos from which derives a cohesive school community with strong local links. He has won the confidence of staff, students and other stakeholders and this has been crucial in

taking forward his vision for the future. Improvements in students' personal development, behaviour and attendance have created a better climate for learning, and in improving these outcomes the academy has made good progress. By contrast, the rate of improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and the use of assessment is slower. Systems to monitor and evaluate the impact of actions to improve teaching as the academy strives to further raise attainment lack the necessary rigour to keep pace with the rate of improvement evident in other areas of work. A greater coherence between the numerous development plans, combined with a sharper focus on success criteria, timescales and milestone checks, are necessary to make these tools effective in supporting further improvement.

Senior staff, some new to the academy, are growing into their roles as the academy enters the final stages in a process to restructure leadership and management. The vibrant governing body has firmly established systems and structures to enable governors to carry out their role. Governors' and sponsors' strong links in the local community have helped cement relationships. The Chair of the Governing Body keeps track of the training undertaken by individuals and the development needs of the group. Policies and procedures around safeguarding meet statutory requirements. Sponsors carefully monitor the academy's budget.

Despite an uneven picture in the rate of improvement of different aspects of provision, senior and middle leaders collectively demonstrate satisfactory capacity to tackle the remaining challenges and to sustain improvement longer term. Much has been achieved. Work since January 2009 has built a strong foundation from which to continue to improve provision and outcomes.

### External support

The improvements brought about by the academy have been achieved almost entirely as a result of actions taken by the Principal, the governing body and the academy's own staff. The academy recognises the contribution of the School Improvement Partner in developing approaches to intervention to support underachieving groups. Other external partners have not identified or helped the academy address weaknesses in their quality assurance and strategic planning.

### Main judgements

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that all staff make effective and regular use of assessment in lessons to check that students' understanding is secure.

- Ensure that learning activities serve the needs of all students well by providing individuals and groups with the right level of challenge so that they make consistently good progress.
- Increase the rigour of monitoring, especially in relation to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, so that staff's development needs are identified quickly and weaknesses are decisively tackled.
- Establish time frames and clear success criteria against which the impact of actions, especially those taken to improve classroom practice, can be measured.

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

Yours sincerely

Cathy Kirby  
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc           the Chair of the Governing Body  
              the Academies Group, DCSF [[Paul.hann@dcyf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.hann@dcyf.gsi.gov.uk) ]