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Mrs Bailey  
Principal  
The Sir Robert Woodard Academy  
Upper Boundstone Lane  
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Dear Mrs Bailey

## **Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of The Sir Robert Woodard Academy**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Patricia Metham HMI to your academy on 16 and 17 November 2010, 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, watched 22 lessons, scrutinised documents, including reports from the academy improvement partner, the academy improvement plan and minutes from governing body meetings. Inspectors held meetings with the Principal, senior and middle leaders, and groups of students from Key Stage 3, 4 and the sixth form. The lead inspector also met with a representative of the governing body.

### **Context**

The Sir Robert Woodard Academy, which specialises in performing arts and mathematics, opened in September 2009. It admits students from 11 to 18 years and is sponsored by the Woodard Schools and co-sponsored by West Sussex County Council. It is based in the same accommodation of its predecessor school. A new academy building located on the site is under construction and scheduled to open in summer 2011.

The academy is non-selective and currently educates 1154 students. It serves an area of high social and economic disadvantage. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with that found nationally. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above national average. The large majority of students are of White British heritage and the vast majority speak English as their first language.

The Principal took up her post in January 2009. Seven of the 10 senior leaders started at the academy when it opened in September 2009 and many other staff were also newly appointed. The academy currently has 12 newly qualified teachers and five new middle leaders. It has faced significant challenges in recruiting mathematics teachers and has only recently appointed a new director of mathematics who will join the academy in January 2011.

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

Since the opening of the Academy attention has rightly focused on giving every student challenging targets and providing intervention to support students in danger of not meeting their targets. In the past a large proportion of students had poor attitudes to learning and low aspirations. A new, more positive climate for learning has developed as a result of higher expectations of students and staff, raising student aspirations and much improved behaviour. Students join the academy having attained below and often well below average results at the end of Key Stage 2. Standards in Key Stage 3 and 4 are low because of a legacy of underachievement, limited challenge and a lack of consistently good teaching. However, standards are starting to improve and the rates at which students are now making progress are just beginning to accelerate.

In 2010 the percentage of students attaining five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE rose to 66%, a rise of 16% from 2009. While this remains below the national average for 2010, this represents a good rate of improvement for Year 11 students last year. The percentage of students achieving five A\* to G passes also rose to 90% and were broadly average. However, the proportion of students achieving five or more A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics, was below average at 37%. This was below the Academy's target of 46%. This was directly attributable to inadequate completion of coursework for GCSE English in Year 10. Despite tireless efforts to remedy this through catch-up sessions and extensive one-to-one support, expectations for English were not met. The reverse was true of mathematics where the percentage of students attaining grade C or above rose to 53%. The target of 50% achieving five or more A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics, in 2011 is a very challenging target for the academy this year and the better progress of Year 11 students suggests that the academy will meet this target.

There remain gaps in the performance of student groups in Key Stage 4 and high variability in A\* to C grades across subject areas. In 2010 students studying the BTEC courses in both performing arts and in dance achieved 100% in A\* to C passes. This contrasts sharply with other subjects where A\* to C grades were mostly below 50%. The good teaching in the performing arts is having good impact upon student results in these subjects. Standards by the end of Key Stage 3 are below age-related expectations and some students do not make expected progress because their literacy skills are weak. There remain some significant differences in attainment of students in subjects across Key Stage 3 and 4. Senior leaders are rapidly tackling these gaps in performance through more rigorous systems for monitoring progress and helping all staff to fully understand student progress by using the criteria for National Curriculum levels. An impressive amount of work has been completed in assessing the needs of every student at the academy. This has generated a detailed plan of the needs of each student and leaders are now able to deploy teaching assistants and specialist support more effectively. This is helping students to overcome barriers to their learning and is enabling more robust monitoring of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

Students are responding well to the new ethos of the academy and enjoy the new chapter structure which they feel gives them a sense of belonging. The chapter structure also fosters good relationships between students of different ages. Inter-chapter competitions provide good opportunity for healthy debate and sporting activities and whole academy events, such as the Africa days as part of the world cup football competition last year, unite different chapters.

A resounding message from students is that behaviour is rapidly improving and incidents of bullying are decreasing. Students say this is a result of consistent use of sanctions for poor behaviour, higher expectations of students, better relationships with teachers and greater commitment to learning. Inspectors observed mostly good behaviour in lessons and around the academy. A small minority of students persist in causing low level disruption, often because teaching lacks pace and does not provide sufficient challenge to keep them motivated. The previously high percentage of fixed period exclusions has significantly reduced and attendance is now rising. Understanding the values of the Christian faith is starting to secure a better caring student community.

Students possess increasing loyalty to the academy because they see how hard leaders work to give them a positive experience of education. Students feel their voice is being heard and valued by leaders and their ideas for changes respected.

The importance of moving into the new very different style of building has not been lost on students. The student council appreciated the chance to visit the partly constructed building and listen to how cutting edge communication information and

technology resources will change their learning environment, especially within the new larger classrooms and performance spaces for drama, dance and music.

### **The effectiveness of provision**

The quality of teaching is starting to improve but there is still some inconsistency. This is the result of weaknesses which lead to a lack of clarity regarding what students are intended to learn and work which is insufficiently matched to students' needs. Teachers do not use assessment information adequately enough to plan learning and there are weaknesses in the quality of marking. Students do not get enough feedback on how they can improve their work.

In the very best lessons teaching and learning are good because the atmosphere of the classroom is highly conducive to learning. The strengths in teaching seen were the good subject knowledge of most teachers, a good range of paired, group and independent activity among students and the energy and enthusiasm of teachers which enlivens the pace of lessons. Good teaching seen in music, drama and dance was also characterised by effective use of self- and peer-assessment that purposefully supported student progress using clear success criteria.

When teaching is less than good and occasionally is inadequate, planning is not matched students' different levels of ability, work lacks challenge for more able students and opportunities are missed for less-able students to work at a different pace. Teaching is not always flexible enough in responding to what happens in lessons. A few teachers lack confidence to take risks and explore more creative ways of learning. Inadequate teaching resulted from poor planning, too little time for students to be involved in learning and work that was far too easy for some students.

A revised timetable structure of three 100 minute lessons has reduced lateness to lessons and given scope for more in-depth learning. While this presents challenges for teachers' planning, for students it provides greater opportunity to focus upon fewer subjects each day. Most students say they learn more because of longer lessons.

The integrated curriculum in Year 7 is beginning to reshape how students learn in Key Stage 3. A thematic cross-curricular model is emerging and personal learning and thinking skills feature prominently. This is giving students better opportunity to access learning and is establishing good transition from Year 6 to 7. Courses in Key Stage 4 provide a good balance of BTEC and GCSE qualifications, complemented by vocational courses delivered in partnership with local colleges. A specific programme to develop life skills supports Year 11 students, enhancing their employability and raising self-esteem.

The academy's specialism in performing arts is a shining light in its work and students are extremely positive about the quality of teaching in drama, dance and music. They relish the opportunities offered to them through productions, performances in the community and workshops with leading artists from the industry. The academy's specialism in mathematics is much less developed and has a long way to go to be as equally prominent as performing arts. The very good work in performing arts is not yet used widely enough across the academy to model different approaches to learning.

The quality of care, guidance and support for students is a strength of the academy's work. Staff know students well and are sensitive to issues which affect student behaviour and attitudes. Students feel that in the new chapter structure they have someone to talk to. The pastoral support for the most vulnerable is good and students increasingly understand how to manage their emotional, social or behavioural difficulties. Excellent relationships with external agencies help senior leaders target support for welfare needs. Good training for child protection helps staff understand how to raise concerns and safeguarding procedures are firmly in place.

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

Since the academy opened, the principal has successfully led staff in shaping and communicating the vision for the academy. Her energy is infectious, instilling a strong belief in creating an innovative learning community where every student succeeds. Demands on the academy last year were well managed and the principal's resilience and determination to establish new systems, clear priorities for development and increased accountability through new tiers of management, has secured foundations upon which the academy can now go from strength to strength. There has been no room for complacency. Senior leaders recognise that following a year of radical change, there is a need to consolidate and drive consistency throughout the academy this year.

Senior leaders have a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development. This shared understanding has helped the cohesiveness of their team work. Their commitment to solving problems in weaker areas and celebrating strengths of the academy is guiding staff through changes. The academy improvement and the raising attainment plan have clear strategic priorities but these do not give sharp enough information about outcomes for different student groups. This makes it difficult for senior leaders and governors to evaluate the impact of strategic decisions.

New processes for assuring quality of teaching and learning are now established, such as learning walks, book scrutiny, formal lesson observations and regular management meetings. Senior leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching in each department and this aligns well with what the inspection team

observed. Staff are now more rigorously required to account for standards in their lessons and take increased responsibility for reviewing their own teaching. Senior leaders know that in some departments the pace of change has been adversely affected by staff turnover and weaknesses in the quality of teaching.

The effectiveness and capacity of middle leaders, such as the directors of subjects and curriculum team leaders, are beginning to improve. This is because senior leaders provide sound help to steer their analysis of assessment data and how to assure the quality of provision in their departments. As a result, some middle leaders are more confident in dealing with weak practice.

There are many strengths in the new leadership of the academy but some initiatives are too new and the impact on raising standards and the quality of teaching is just beginning.

The governing body is knowledgeable about the academy and draws on reports from the principal to assess the rate of improvement. It does not provide sufficient challenge to leaders about the progress of groups of students. Minutes of meetings report action taken and decisions but do not give a sufficiently penetrating insight into challenging discussions that take place.

### **The sixth form**

The leadership of the post-16 chapter is striving to turn around an inherited legacy of underachievement with many students performing poorly at both AS level and A level. Poor information advice and guidance led many students to choose inappropriate courses and retention rates were low. This is now improving and a marked increase in the number on roll is testimony to better guidance from Year 11 into Year 12. Information and guidance has improved and helps students select courses best suited to their ability and interests. Results for 2010 show some improvement because of better teaching but there remain inconsistencies in levels of success across subjects.

The academy wide audit of student needs is helping leaders to provide additional study support. The quality of teaching in the sixth form mirrors that in Key Stage 3 and 4. The pathways available in the sixth form offer good choice, but in some instances very small class sizes limit the opportunity for group discussion.

Students participate well in the enrichment opportunities but are not yet secure in knowing how their post-16 status serves as an ambassadorial role for the academy and for younger students.

## **External support**

The academy has responded well to appropriate support from National Challenge Advisers and the academy improvement partner. Senior leaders carefully balance the level of support from outside the academy with maximising capacity by making sure staff are fastidious in their work and accountable for standards. There has not been heavy reliance upon external support because there is good capacity to drive improvement from within the senior leadership team.

## **Main Judgements**

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

## **Priorities for further improvement**

- Increase the proportion of consistently good and outstanding teaching by:
  - embedding the use of assessment information in teachers' planning so that lessons provide extension and challenge for the more able students and provide support for the less able students
  - improving the quality and consistency of marking so that all students receive clear guidance about what to improve, how and why and can link feedback to their targets.
  
- Establish a clear relationship and line of sight between the academy's strategic priorities and how outcomes for different groups students are measured at department level by:
  - strengthening the capacity of middle leaders to quality assure and lead department action planning and assess standards and progress for different groups of students.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, 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

Joanna Beckford-Hall  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**