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4 February 2011

Mrs Kerry Inscker  
South Wolverhampton and Bilston Academy  
Wolverhampton Road East  
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WV4 6AP

Dear Mrs Inscker

## **Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of South Wolverhampton and Bilston Academy**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit to with Brian Cartwright HMI to your academy on 2 and 3 February 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 and met with the principal, senior staff, groups of students, a representative of the sponsors and academy trust.

### **Context**

The South Wolverhampton and Bilston Academy opened in September 2009 on the two sites of the former Parkfield High School. It serves two very distinct communities in Blakenhall and Bilston. The two sites are approximately three miles apart. The current main site is in Blakenhall with the new build opening in Bilston in 2012. Since becoming an academy the specialism has changed from modern foreign languages to science and engineering. The transition of leadership from the predecessor school to the new Academy was completed in stages. The headteacher of the predecessor school retired in March 2009. An interim principal was appointed between March 2009 and December 2009. The new principal of the academy took up post in January 2010. In addition to this there have been significant changes to the senior

leadership team with only three original members remaining. A new vice principal joined in April 2010 with an assistant principal joining in November 2010. A staffing re-structure was completed in the summer of 2010.

South Wolverhampton and Bilston Academy is smaller than most schools. There are currently 693 on roll, including 100 in the sixth form. Attainment on entry is well below the national average. The number of students known to be eligible for free school meals is very much higher than the national average. The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than the national figure and the proportion of those who speak English as an additional language is high. Over half the students are White British, the biggest group are students from an Indian heritage background. The proportion of students registered by the academy as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above the national figure. There are a small number of children in the academy who are looked after by the local authority. The academy had 39 new arrival students joining during the school year in 2009/10 and six this academic year. The students are mainly from Eastern Europe and in the early stages of learning English.

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

Although attainment remains low there has been notable improvement. The proportion of students obtaining five A\* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics rose to 36%, an increase of ten percentage points. Students whose first language is not English performed well, gaining above average standards, including 60% of them gaining five A\* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics. Students made the expected progress overall from low starting points, in most subjects including English and mathematics. Girls made above average progress, boys broadly in line, with about a dozen boys with special educational needs and/or disabilities underachieving. The school reports a number of particular factors connected to individuals in this group that restricted their achievement, but they all achieved some measure of success; no student failed to get any qualification at all. A higher proportion of the current Year 11 have already gained GCSE C grades in English and mathematics, compared with the previous cohort. Attainment is rising strongly.

Students in the sixth form make satisfactory progress. Attainment while improving is below that of the national average. There is a wide variation across subjects but students studying BTEC Childcare achieve well.

Students behave well in and around the school, and report a better working ethos, compared with their recollection of the predecessor school. A new, staged behaviour policy is generally working well, with the initially high number of infringements reducing over time. Serious incidents leading to fixed term exclusions are reducing although are still above average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities experiencing an exclusion mirrors the school's overall

proportions of such students, but there are a disproportionate number of White British heritage students being excluded.

Attendance is below average. Changes to staffing and the reorganisation of the schools pastoral care system, and the availability of specialist educational welfare staff to deal with persistent absentees have only recently begun to show early signs of improving attendance. This is now under the sole control of the school's own staff. Lesson by lesson attendance is carefully monitored, with students arriving promptly. The recently arrived students from Eastern Europe feature disproportionately in absence figures.

### **The effectiveness of provision**

Inspectors jointly observed 22 lessons with senior managers, there are notable strengths and some examples of outstanding and good practice. In the most successful lessons teachers sustain a good pace, use imaginative activities that are, varied and skilfully managed. Assessment processes are integral to the students' learning, often involving the students in peer or self-assessment of work undertaken. Teachers plan in detail and make lesson objectives clear and precise, often setting different expectations for students based on different starting points. Teachers use questions carefully to extend students' answers and to prompt them to explain their ideas. They use strong relationships to create a purposeful but encouraging atmosphere in lessons which, along with high expectations, enables students to make good progress. However, there remains too much teaching that is satisfactory. The most common limitations are: in planning, work for individuals or groups is not pitched at the right level, so individuals find the work difficult or too easy. Teachers' use of assessment does not take full account of students' prior learning so all students undertake the same work. At times, teachers talk too much so there are not enough opportunities for students to work independently. In a minority of lessons teachers have not considered well enough how to deploy teaching assistants to secure good progress.

Most students know their working levels and the grades or targets that they are aiming for, but their next steps are not always effectively guided by marking. The academy has rightly introduced a revised policy on marking which is being relaunched to rectify the inconsistencies in the quality of teachers' marking. In the best practice teachers are assessing students' achievement and are giving advice to students on how to make the next step in their learning. In many cases, a meaningful dialogue between students and teachers takes place but this is inconsistent across subjects. Also there are not sufficient opportunities for students to respond to comments and targets.

The recent change in the school's specialist areas are yet to show in outcomes for students at Key Stage 4, but the science curriculum has already changed to ensure students have access to three different science courses. There are examples of outstanding teaching in technology, with very high demands on students that

engage and inspire their interest. Other curriculum options have also widened, in collaboration with the local College, so that the current Key Stage 4 options planned for starting in September 2011 will widen provision and allow a better match of the curriculum to student talent and preference. The sixth form curriculum offer is limited but enhanced by partnerships with local schools and the local college.

The tracking of student progress, and the subsequent use of the wealth of data to guide lesson planning and particular intervention is developing quickly but is still at an early stage. There is a new special needs co-ordinator, who has sufficient expertise to oversee the provision for students on the schools register for special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are now clearer designations of specialist tasks assigned to teaching assistants, and a whole-school plan that deploys classroom assistants alongside particular pupils. The vertical tutorial system is very new, with some limitations as a result of the split site organisation, so this means that students do not meet their tutors on a daily basis. The academy provides effective care and guidance and support for students.

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

The academy is led effectively by the principal and senior staff. They set a clear direction focused on raising students' achievement and improving their personal development. The academy made a slow start until the arrival of the principal and other new senior leaders. Senior staff have clear responsibilities and work together well to implement strategic plans. The academy has focused unrelentingly on the achievement of students in Key Stage 4 and, particularly, on English and mathematics. Systems to monitor and track students' progress have been strengthened very considerably. The principal's determination to bring about the integration of the two sites as quickly as possible has been very successful. Working practices have been radically changed so that all students use both sites during the week; this has quickly led to a common sense of identity, and shared values and expectations for all students by all staff. The school meets safeguarding requirements.

The quality of teaching is monitored regularly and the academy has taken care to support satisfactory teachers and thus there are very few inadequate lessons. Evaluations of the quality of teaching and teaching are not yet sufficiently rigorous and are not used effectively to strengthen classroom practice. There are a range of useful programmes to improve teaching skills. Senior staff recognise the need to identify and share the most effective practice more widely to improve teaching further. The academy is building capacity within the ranks of middle managers to sustain and drive improvement. There are now well defined systems by which the senior staff support and challenge the subject leaders to improve performance in their subjects. The departmental self review and evaluation is a comprehensive document and a useful framework for middle leaders and line managers to evaluate progress in their areas of responsibility. There is increased accountability, through

line management calendar but this had yet to be fully embedded and a full cycle completed.

The academy trust board set the strategic direction for the academy and is the key decision making body while the local governing body undertakes a monitoring function. The trust board have a well-organised committee structure which regularly reviews all aspects of the academy's progress. Members of the trust board are very knowledgeable about the academy and are, consequently, in a strong position to provide suitable challenge. There is effective representation of all sponsors and links between the different sub-committees. The performance and standards committee is well placed to review the academy's performance.

### **External support**

The academy receives effective challenge and support from its School Improvement Partner which has been used to raise attainment. Representatives of the sponsors such as City of Wolverhampton College offer appropriate specialised support in teaching and development of the curriculum.

### **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 ensuring teachers consistently use assessment information to plan challenging learning activities for the full range of student abilities.
- Further develop the role of middle leaders, so they are systematically evaluating provision in their areas, including the monitoring of teaching and assessment.
- Ensure there are effective strategies in place to reduce the number of students who have low levels of attendance and are persistently absent.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education [*same person at Academies Group as in cc. list below*], 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

Davinder Dosanjh  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**