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Ms J Shadick
Principal
Swindon Academy
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Dear Ms J Shadick

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools: monitoring inspection of Swindon Academy

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your academy with two additional inspectors on 4 May 2011, for the time you gave to our phone discussion and the on site planning meeting. I appreciate the range of information which you provided before and during the inspection. Please pass on my thanks to the governor who took the time to come into the academy to meet me. I would also appreciate it if you could pass on our thanks to your students who were able to add a great deal to the visit with their friendly manner and willingness to tell us all about the academy.

As a result of the inspection on 27 January 2010, the academy was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the academy has made good progress in making improvements and good progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement.

The academy has been successful in developing a clear ethos that values learning and encourages success for all students. The mature behaviour of students and their engagement in the wide range of opportunities demonstrate this. Students lack confidence but this is improving as they see and experience more and more success. In general, students enter the academy with standards that are significantly below what would be expected for their age. Attainment overall is low but there is a significant rising trend. The validated data from 2010 show that by the end of Key Stage 4 77% of students gain five or more GCSE A*-C grades. This is slightly above the national average. The proportion achieving five or more GCSE A*-C grades including English and mathematics is, however, below the national average. Progress in Key Stage 2 has improved but attainment remains low. Leaders are clear that this

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will remain a key focus for success. Students in the sixth form are now embarked on courses that are more appropriately matched to their needs and subsequently achievement is higher. There are many students who make at least good progress in the academy. Some are on target for achieving GCSE grades A*-C in Year 9. The academy tracks students' progress effectively. Staff have a clear understanding of individual students' learning needs. This is increasingly being used to inform teaching and when it is used well progress is accelerated. The academy has improved the diagnostic assessments in mathematics. This information is being used well to accelerate the progress students make in mathematics. As a consequence of the improved use of assessment, foundations for future learning are now much firmer.

The inspirational principal and her leadership team monitor the academy's work very effectively and have a thorough understanding of strengths and areas for further development. With this clear perspective, they are successful in prioritising well and implementing a systematic and effective development plan across the academy. Governors challenge the academy leaders and prompt further development targets. Leaders have taken decisive action to support teachers and improve the quality of teaching. There are rigorous systems in place to develop teaching at all levels. The proportion of teaching that is consistently good has improved significantly. There is, however, no complacency with this success and staff and middle leaders are increasingly contributing to the academy's success. They are clear that high quality learning experiences are key to increasing the progress of all students and are working very hard to develop this further. The best of lessons build students' confidence and allow them to develop greater independence in their learning with clear feedback, including in the sixth form. The most successful teachers use students' tracking information skilfully in planning, to target opportunities for individual students and use their excellent subject knowledge to enthuse learners and develop thinking with sharp questioning.

The sixth form curriculum is now much better matched to the needs of individuals. A wide range of students are eager to stay on in the sixth form as they feel the academy knows them well and is able to support their learning journey. The guidance for students includes engagement with university experiences and support for university applications. The sixth form is small but is growing quickly.

The academy has developed a wide range of highly effective partnerships including partnerships with a major industrial manufacturer and with Marlborough College. The academy is also developing a virtual sixth form with students embarked on a Futsal training programme. This sports based programme is helping to motivate and challenge students, particularly those who have not previously readily engaged with other learning opportunities. It is also developing as part of the Futsal scholarship nationwide programme. Wider learning opportunities for the community are also being developed and there is a clear commitment from the academy to the local community. One example of this is the work staff are doing with parents to improve the awareness of internet safety.

The academy has specialisms in science, business and enterprise. The attainment in science has improved rapidly. The 2010 validated data shows that the number of students achieving at least two A*-C grades at GCSE or equivalent in science is 95% compared to 61% nationally. The business and enterprise culture is building through the ethos of the school. This is seen in staff and students with a very effective sense of purpose, direction and the business feel to the very professional environment.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your academy. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Scott
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2010

- Raise standards by:
 - increasing the whole school focus on numeracy so that the progress that pupils make in mathematics is on a par with English
 - ensuring that pupils make more rapid progress at Key Stage 2.

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - increasing the proportion of teaching that is consistently good
 - sharing good practice to support less secure teaching
 - ensuring greater consistency in the quality of feedback, particularly for the less able and in the use of assessment.

- Improve outcomes in the sixth form by:
 - developing more opportunities for independent learning
 - regularly reviewing the curriculum to ensure it is meeting students' needs and interests
 - improving the quality of guidance for students.