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Ms Lesley Kirby  
Principal  
Richmond Park Academy  
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Dear Ms Kirby

## **Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Richmond Park Academy**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Daniel Towl HMI to your academy on 8 and 9 December 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 headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, students, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the sponsors.

### **Context**

This mixed 11–16 academy opened in September 2010 and replaces the Shene School. There are 505 students on roll. Of these, 43% are from White British backgrounds and approximately 55% are from minority ethnic groups. The percentage of students whose first language is not English is high. There is a higher-than-average percentage of boys. The number of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also above average. The academy has dual specialist status in English and business, and maths and computing. Currently, there are plans to offer sixth form provision in the near future.

Funding for extensive refurbishment and some new buildings has been approved by the Secretary of State for Education, with work planned to start in 2012. The Academies Enterprise Trust is the sponsor.

The academy is fully staffed and turnover of staff in some key areas has been stabilised.

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

The large majority of students enter the academy with broadly average levels of attainment but the literacy and numeracy skills of many are underdeveloped. In 2010, a number of key performance indicators for attainment in the predecessor school were significantly below the national average. The percentage of students achieving five higher-grade GCSEs was 57%, with 40% including English and mathematics in the five subjects. Unvalidated data for 2011 show 80% of students achieving five higher-grade GCSEs, with 44% including English and mathematics. The strengthened system for tracking students' progress enables the academy to monitor the performance of individuals and groups closely. Previous underachievement, particularly evident for boys, students known to be eligible for free school meals and some students with special educational needs has been tackled rigorously. Observations of lessons and the academy's own reliable assessment data indicate that all groups are making better progress than previously, with no notable differences. Students are on track to get close to their very challenging targets in 2012. This includes a considerable increase in the number of students counting English and mathematics in the five A\* to C GCSE grades.

Students are growing in confidence and enjoy a positive experience in the classroom. In the best lessons, they are encouraged to become independent learners through activities that are well matched to their needs, present an element of challenge and provoke them to think for themselves. Clear success criteria are shared, with effective use of exemplar materials and high-quality resources. Students have opportunities to evaluate their own and others' work, and to develop their understanding and ideas, as well as their speaking and listening skills, through collaborative activities. Good and often excellent questioning is used to deepen and evaluate students' grasp of key learning points. Consequently, students make at least good progress.

### **Other relevant pupil outcomes**

Students' engagement with learning has improved as a result of teaching, care and support that are better matched to their needs. Students are known and valued as individuals. The warm and encouraging relationships that permeate the academy underpin the positive attitudes that most have to school life. Students are proud of the improvements that have been made since the change to academy status and

they are developing a strong sense of belonging. The clear and consistently applied system of behaviour management emphasises the relationship between positive behaviour and effective learning. The impact is apparent in students' improved understanding that their cooperation and involvement in lessons are central to their success.

Inspectors talked with a wide range of students, who were unanimous in saying that they felt safe in school. They felt free from any form of harassment and were confident that if any problems arose they would be dealt with quickly and well by staff. The diverse community of the academy is harmonious, with students from all backgrounds working and socialising together happily. Students have welcomed the increasing opportunities to make a positive contribution to the academy and the wider community. Prefects help with the smooth day-to-day running of the academy and the head boy and girl are excellent ambassadors. Recently, students have achieved some notable sporting successes, particularly in football and table tennis. Students feel that their opinions are listened to and the well-run academy council gives them an effective platform for expressing their views.

The academy has sophisticated and robust systems for monitoring attendance. They have been effective in greatly reducing persistent absence. Students' punctuality has also improved. Current figures for attendance are above average.

### **The effectiveness of provision**

Teaching is improving, with an increasing proportion that is good or outstanding. Where teaching is at its most effective, students are fully absorbed in challenging work that develops their skills and understanding at a rapid pace. Teachers have good subject knowledge and a detailed picture of students' prior attainment. They probe students' understanding of appropriate learning objectives and tackle any misconceptions and gaps in their knowledge successfully. Assessment information is used well to tailor learning to individual needs and promote students' understanding of their work and how to build up subject-specific competence. Not all teachers are equally expert in exercising these skills. In some lessons, while students may make satisfactory or even good progress, teachers do not recognise and/or fail to grasp opportunities to move individuals to a higher level of learning when they are ready. Where learning support assistants were not available to work alongside teachers, the wide spread of ability and need in some classes occasionally slowed progress because it was impossible for the teacher to provide the high level of one-to-one support required.

The flexible curriculum is responsive to the needs of students. It offers an appropriate mixture of vocational and academic courses with clear pathways to future opportunities. Students with special educational needs receive well-targeted support, with high levels of effective one-to-one tuition offered through discrete programmes. The wide variety of extra-curricular activities enhances students' enjoyment and learning. The academy has recently appointed a member of staff to

coordinate the development of students' literacy skills across subjects. However, this work is at a very early stage.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The strong and clear leadership of the headteacher has galvanised self-belief in staff and students. The capacity of leaders to drive improvement has been developed at all levels. Middle leaders are growing in confidence and are fully involved in the rigorous cycle of monitoring and evaluation. They work well as a team with a sharp focus on improving teaching and learning. The distribution of responsibilities to create a wider leadership team has injected ambition and energy into converting satisfactory teaching to good, and good to outstanding. The development of teaching and learning communities where cross-sections of staff come together to observe and learn from each other has established a culture where the quality of teaching is openly and enthusiastically debated. The academy's lesson observation records were in line with the judgements made by the inspection team.

A comprehensive development plan containing precise, challenging targets for raising attainment is reviewed regularly. Opportunities for professional development are integral to the plan and linked to appropriate whole-school priorities and the individual needs of staff. The academy's analysis of performance data is far more strategic. Teachers have access to detailed information about students' prior attainment and understand that they are accountable for their progress. A refined, rigorous system for tracking students' progress ensures that underachievement is tackled. Where necessary, students are supported by well-planned and -evaluated interventions. The academy is determined to ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to succeed and is not in any way disadvantaged.

The highly organised governing body is dedicated to the academy's success. The complementary skill-mix of governors is being used well to shape the strategic direction of the academy and drive improvement. Governors are equally adept at supporting and challenging senior leaders. They ensure the arrangements for safeguarding students meet current requirements.

The expansion of the school's network of partnerships and community links augments provision for students and extends their opportunities to become involved in community activities. The reputation of the academy within the community is deservedly far more positive than previously, with a steadily growing proportion of students making the academy their first choice.

### **External support**

The academy's sponsors have provided very good support to the school through a range of consultants and by establishing new systems that have accelerated the improvement of teaching and learning. They acknowledge that they have a critical

role to play in making certain that the momentum of improvement is not disrupted by the refurbishment and extension of the academy's buildings.

### **Main judgements**

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Further raise students' attainment, particularly in English and mathematics, by ensuring all teachers are equally expert in:
  - using assessment information to identify and tackle gaps in students' skills and understanding
  - recognising when students are ready to move to a higher level of learning and creating the flexibility within lessons to enable them to do so.
- Extend students' understanding of the steps they must take to improve their subject-specific skills and achieve their challenging target levels and grades.
- Develop and embed a cross-curricular approach to the improvement of students' literacy skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline White  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

cc           Chair of the Governing Body  
              The Academies Advisers Unit, DfE