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Ms J Bloor  
Principal  
Shirebrook Academy  
Common Lane  
Shirebrook  
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NG20 8QF

Dear Ms Bloor

## **Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Shirebrook Academy**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Jacqueline Pentlow, additional inspector, to your academy on 22–23 February 2012, 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, other members of staff, groups of students, and the Chair of the Governing Body who also represents the sponsors.

### **Context**

The academy opened in the buildings of the predecessor school in September 2010. It will move into new buildings at Easter 2013 and building works are currently on schedule. The academy has specialisms in science and construction. Academy staff teach some courses to Year 12 students who are registered with Chesterfield College. The Principal took up post in April 2010, a term before the academy opened. Almost all staff transferred from the predecessor school but around a third of current teachers have been appointed since the academy opened. Almost all students are of White British background. Around 30% of students, above the

national average, are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is also above average.

### **Achievement of pupils at the academy**

Students join the academy with attainment which is below average, especially in English. The attainment of Year 11 students in summer 2011 was in line with the national average and, in some cases, above average. The proportion of students achieving five higher GCSE grades improved to 79% from 58% in the predecessor school. With English and mathematics included, it improved from 44% to 55%, which is in line with the national average. However, attainment in science was below that nationally and students made weaker progress in this subject than others. Year 11 students made good progress in comparison to all students nationally. Disabled students, those with special educational needs and those known to be eligible for free school meals also made good progress. Staff use the regular and thorough monitoring of students' progress to identify accurately any who are not on track to meet their targets. They then provide effective support and interventions to raise achievement.

The academy's assessment information indicates that current Year 11 students are on track to improve on the results of 2011. They have already matched the proportion achieving five higher GCSE grades including English and mathematics. The move to one-year courses for option choices, open to both Year 10 and 11 students, has raised achievement and widened participation in previously less popular subjects. The academy's analysis of students' progress indicates that most groups are on track to achieve the challenging targets set for them. The academy acknowledges the low literacy levels of students on entry, especially in their reading skills, and has raised expectations for all teachers to include literacy skills in their lesson planning. Although these initiatives are in their early stages, inspectors observed effective lessons where teachers combined important literacy skills with their own subject objectives to improve the quality of learning. For example, in a Year 7 humanities lesson, the teacher carefully prepared students to practise skimming a text for main events and scanning it for specific information.

In lessons, students make mostly good progress. They have good attitudes to learning and try hard to complete the work set for them. Students concentrate well and collaborate effectively with each other. They answer teachers' questions willingly. However, their answers are not always detailed or phrased in the way that they might subsequently need to be written. Students readily assess their own work and, occasionally, that of their peers, although this does not routinely involve using clear criteria to identify when they have achieved expectations.

### **The quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching is improving markedly. An increasing proportion of lessons is good or outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers set very clear objectives and high expectations. They challenge students throughout the lesson to secure

understanding and apply skills effectively. The pace of lessons is well judged, based on regular and thorough assessment. Teachers use a wide range of questions to probe students' knowledge and develop their ideas. For example, in a geography lesson, the teacher pushed students to demonstrate that they could use their research of statistics to show how people's quality of life differs in Ghana and the United Kingdom. Teachers also develop literacy skills, for example using storytelling in a music lesson to aid students' composition skills. This lesson also emphasised the cultural importance of folk tales and traditional music. In less effective lessons, some teachers talk for too long, limiting the time students have to apply what they have learnt. Occasionally, in maintaining the pace of a lesson, teachers move students on before they have secured their understanding. This then limits students' progress. In these lessons, all students complete the same task and no adjustment is made for their differing capabilities and confidence.

Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress because teachers structure learning at an appropriate level but encourage them to aim high in terms of targets. For example, in an English lesson, the teacher used students' own assessment of their confidence in a writing task to show them what they could achieve before they set themselves a target and finished the writing. Almost all set a challenging target and completed an extended set of points and explanations. Additional adults in lessons provide effective support to students, helping them to understand but ensuring that they complete the work individually.

Teachers assess students regularly and record their performance so that their progress towards their targets is monitored. They generally mark students' work regularly but the quality of comments to help students improve their work varies between subjects and, sometimes, within subjects. Although teachers identify key literacy errors in students' work, it is not always made clear to students how they should correct the errors and show that they understand. As a result, especially in Key Stage 3, literacy problems persist for some students. However, these are increasingly overcome in Key Stage 4 because of effective teaching, leading to results in English and mathematics which are broadly average.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Students state that they feel safe at the academy and that there is very little bullying of any type. They have confidence that staff will deal promptly with any issues. They also understand and value the behaviour management system, enjoying the rewards which are an important part of it. They report that good behaviour in lessons almost always enables them to get on with their work. Lesson observations confirmed this. Students have positive attitudes to learning and the effective relationships formed by staff encourage them to concentrate and persevere in tasks. They move around the academy calmly and safely, showing respect for each other. Staff work effectively to support students whose circumstances make them vulnerable and this intervention is usually effective in enabling students to continue learning. As a result, almost all groups of students make good progress and no group underachieves.

The academy prioritises good attendance, which continues to improve. Attendance is now approaching 95%, which is well above average. Few students are persistently absent. Students appreciate the wide range of activities, trips and events available through the academy, and the leadership roles they are offered. They respond well to responsibility and benefit from the range of experiences provided.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the academy**

The Principal, with senior staff, sets a clear vision for the academy, raising expectations of achievement and the quality of teaching but building on the strengths of the predecessor school. Students and staff speak positively of the improvement in the academy over its first 18 months. They recognise that key indicators such as results, behaviour, attendance and school procedures have improved. These improving trends demonstrate that effective leadership has secured growing capacity to improve further. Middle leaders are clear about their accountabilities and confident in driving improvement in their areas. They understand their roles in identifying what needs to be better and taking action to drive improvement.

The academy has developed a rigorous process for reviewing the quality of provision and outcomes in subjects. This has led to concerted action to improve provision, for example in science, based on support for teachers and specialised training. The monitoring system relies on regular, unannounced observations of lessons which identify clear strengths in teaching and also areas for development. This information is used effectively to shape training for staff and to provide targeted support for individual teachers. An active group of staff focus on sharing best practice and effective approaches to learning. Staff expertise is used well to demonstrate successful practice and teachers regularly observe each other to help improve their skills. Together with the thorough analysis of assessment information, this underpins the academy's accurate self-evaluation. The analysis of strengths and weaknesses informs development plans well, with relevant priorities and detailed actions to be taken. The governing body sets a clear strategic vision for the academy and knows its strengths and areas for development. The academy fulfils the requirements for keeping students safe.

The academy has successfully developed the curriculum. It is innovative and meets the needs of a wide range of students. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is broad and flexible. The academy uses targeted early entry in the core subjects to raise motivation and this has improved outcomes. Option choices are based on one-year courses where Years 10 and 11 study together. This initiative has already increased numbers in previously less popular subjects and raised achievement. The academy collaborates well with other providers for vocational courses and offers some teaching for students on sixth form courses, although they are registered at a local college. The specialisms in science and construction are beginning to have a higher

profile in the academy. More students now take courses in construction. Improving results in mathematics have raised achievement overall. In Year 7, students now study a humanities course instead of separate history, geography and religious education lessons. This includes a strong element of skills for learning and literacy. It is timetabled on one day with one teacher to increase the opportunity for trips and extended activities and to reduce the number of teachers for Year 7 classes. It is popular with students. The academy also provides a flexible and effective range of support and interventions to ensure students remain on track to meet their targets. Increasingly, there is a strong emphasis on raising literacy and numeracy skills, reflected in the successful literacy week taking place during the inspection.

### **External support**

The academy receives effective support from its sponsors. Sheffield Hallam University provides opportunities for staff training and facilities for sixth form courses. It has also assisted in improving provision in science. The local authority includes the academy in its network of schools and provides helpful access to some of its specialist services. The academy uses funding and expertise from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust to investigate best practice, facilitate staff visits to other academies and provide training. External specialists assist in the monitoring of teaching and review of subjects.

### **Main Judgements**

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Strengthen teaching and learning in science to raise attainment and accelerate students' progress.
- Ensure that all teachers assess students' understanding effectively in lessons and use this information to challenge them according to their differing abilities.

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. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

cc Chair of the Governing Body  
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