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26 April 2012

Mr Colin Boxall  
Principal  
Bishop of Rochester Academy  
Magpie Hall Road  
Chatham  
ME4 5JB

Dear Mr Boxall

## **Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of Bishop of Rochester Academy**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit to your academy on 25 and 26 April 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 second monitoring inspection in connection with the academies initiative.

### **Evidence**

I observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, senior leaders, middle managers, groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Chair of the Improvement Committee and one representative of the sponsors.

### **Context**

The Bishop of Rochester Academy is a mixed secondary school of average size. The academy is the result of a merger between two local schools in September 2010. It is sponsored by the Church of England, Canterbury Christ Church University and Medway Council. The academy is situated in a selective authority where the highest attaining 31% of students attend grammar schools. There are 37 students in the sixth form in 2011/12, with 103 recruited for 2012/13. The academy operates on two sites with Years 9, 10 and 11 on the West campus and Years 7, 8 and the sixth

form, on the East campus. Building work for the new academy is due for completion in 2013.

The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is more than twice the national average, although the percentage with statements of special educational needs is average. Half of these students have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and the rest have been diagnosed with a range of speech, learning and communication needs, including some with autistic spectrum disorders. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is higher than national average, as is the number of students who are identified as being at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The prior attainment of students on entry to the academy is significantly below the national average. The interim Executive Principal, who was in place since April 2011, has been replaced by the substantive Principal, who took up his post on 16 April 2012. Significant staffing issues resulted in a high level of temporary staff cover during the last academic year. The new Principal has made changes to staffing and some recent key appointments, most of whom, including a head of science and ten teachers, are due to take up their posts from September 2012.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

As noted at the previous inspection visit, the achievement of Year 11 students in 2011 was significantly below the national average and the government's floor target. During this academic year, strategies to raise students' achievements have had some success and 38% of Year 11 students are predicted to achieve five or more GCSE passes at grades A\*-C, including English and mathematics. The academy has raised its expectations of the levels of progress that can be achieved by students between Key Stages 2 and 4. Senior managers have set targets in line with the national average of three levels of progress and are carefully monitoring, in particular, the underachievement of groups of students in Year 11. Where students are not on track to make the required progress, the academy has ensured that they are provided with targeted out-of-class support, after school and at weekends.

Considerable numbers of students make satisfactory progress according to the academy's data, with slightly more than half of them on track to attain their targets in English and mathematics this academic year. This includes those students who are at early stages of learning English as an additional language. However students with statements of special educational need or those who have emotional, social and behavioural difficulties demonstrate variable levels of progress, with some making inadequate progress. The academy has prioritised implementing a more accurate assessment of needs for these students to ensure they receive appropriate support in lessons. The academy has also prioritised greater challenge in lesson activities for more-able students.

In lessons, I observed a significant number of students with good levels of engagement in their learning and with greater confidence to question their teachers when they lacked the skills for a particular task. However, despite some good examples of students demonstrating their knowledge and skills during tasks, in many instances, they were unable to transfer what they had learnt to other relevant contexts, or were unable to explain the relevance of what they had learnt. This was because they had not acquired a deeper understanding of the work. The academy is aware that a number of students continue to lack both confidence and effective skills in speaking, writing and reading, especially in relation to spelling, punctuation and the presentation of work. The academy is reviewing its literacy and language strategies, to meet more effectively the level of need.

All Year 7 students were tested for to ascertain their reading and spelling levels at the start of the year and those identified with low reading ages have been receiving support in small groups. The academy's evaluation demonstrates that two thirds of these have made pleasing progress and increased their reading ages over the two terms, with some moving from a reading age of 8 to one of 11.

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

The safeguarding and behaviour management strategies that were in place at the previous visit have had an impact. Students' behaviour has improved considerably in lessons and around the school site and is satisfactory; students report that behaviour is more conducive to learning this year. The academy, in line with its Christian faith, has recently introduced students and staff to an ethos based on respect and dignity. Most students observed are courteous and well behaved. However, in lessons where activities are not sufficiently absorbing, students lose attention, chatter and misbehave.

Through a sustained focus on behaviour, previously high levels of exclusions have reduced overall, but remain disproportionately high for some groups of students, such as disabled students and those with special educational needs. The number of students excluded on a fixed-term basis for serious incidents of verbal or physical violence against staff and other students has considerably reduced.

The academy has reviewed the effectiveness of its pastoral support systems and is moving from a vertical system of tutoring to a year-group tutor that will enable all students and their parents and carers to have consistent and regular contact with their form tutors. Senior managers believe this will help tackle some of the causes of continuing low attendance, in particular for those who are disaffected and potentially vulnerable. Notably, strategies in place at the previous visit have successfully reduced persistent absence from 20% to 8%.

## **The quality of teaching**

The majority of the teaching observed was satisfactory with a very small minority that was good. A promising start has been made in the use of teaching techniques that result in high levels of interaction and discussion between students.

Collaborative learning and the increasing use of students as 'peer teachers' is proving to be motivational and enjoyable. For instance, in one mathematics lesson, the leader of each group effectively explained the concepts of transformation of shape to others in the group. However, although teachers now have detailed information on students' prior attainment and course work undergoes accurate moderation, a number do not plan their lessons sufficiently in line with their students' diverse ability levels. This results in virtually the same activities and pace of learning for all and, in particular, insufficient challenge for higher attaining students.

Teachers are engaging more meaningfully with students during question-and-answer sessions and some are making increasing use of peer assessment to enable students to check their work. However, the use of a range of assessment activities that check students' learning and inform teachers of the progress that individual students are making is still too variable. In particular, insufficient account is taken of the need to reinforce previous knowledge, skills and newly learnt concepts. This means that in some instances, students develop only a superficial understanding of what they have learnt. In addition, students are often not given sufficient time or the literacy strategies and subject-specific guidance, so that they can self-correct their work more effectively.

In general, students receive feedback on their written work but the feedback lacks precision and fails to identify the next steps required for progression to higher levels. In some lessons, teachers are beginning to share key words and glossaries with students. However, this initiative is not firmly embedded across the curriculum. Marking in books does not consistently highlight the importance of correct grammar and spelling. This term, the use of post cards to affirm good progress and effort has proved to be successful in motivating students.

The academy is reviewing the role of support staff, as senior managers recognise that, at present, they are not involved closely enough in the planning of in-class support and do not effectively help students develop independent learning strategies. The process of assessing the needs of students with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties is confused; the information provided to teachers on specific barriers to learning for each student is not helpful, as there is no guidance given on modified tasks, resources or different approaches to enable them to succeed.

## **The quality of leadership and management of the school**

Since the arrival of the new Principal, there is a greater shared sense of purpose and commitment evident in all managers and teachers. The Principal's strategic vision demonstrates strong leadership as those actions he has initiated illustrate perceptive

insight of what needs to be done to consolidate improvements and address the fundamental weaknesses in the academy's performance. He is rightly focused on raising achievement through developing the capacity of middle leaders, improving the quality of learning and raising attendance. At the time of this monitoring visit, the self-evaluation had not yet been revised to include the new developments in train. Departmental self-evaluations demonstrate variability in quality, and in some instances, a lack of leadership expertise. Senior leaders have prioritised this aspect of the work of middle leaders in order to build capacity.

Middle managers are now more cognisant of their responsibilities through focused professional development and support from senior leaders and they demonstrate greater understanding of the need to act effectively as leaders of learning. There is greater capacity in the academy's senior and middle leaders to undertake more rigorous monitoring of teaching, as they have successfully led teachers in establishing an ethos of behaviour for learning in the classroom. Nevertheless, internal lesson observations contain insufficient focus on the learning, knowledge and skills acquired by individual students during lessons, and over time. Some sharing of good teaching across the curriculum is under way, but the practice is not well established.

Senior leaders have instituted effective systems for tracking students' performance and progress and subsequently tackling the underachievement that exists, especially in the older year groups. However they recognise the need to implement more rigorous systems of standardising these data for younger students to ensure greater accuracy.

The governing body and the sponsors continue to be highly supportive of the academy and have a clearer understanding of the direction of the work and the critical steer required to consolidate actions that will enable the academy to improve further.

### **External support**

The academy is establishing partnerships with local primary and secondary schools and other institutions that can contribute to sharing good practice in teaching and learning. The academy's sponsor, the University of Canterbury, is helping develop capacity through professional training of teachers and middle leaders.

### **Main Judgements**

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the academy has made satisfactory progress in making improvements.

## **Further priorities for improvement**

- Raise standards of achievement, in particular for disabled students, those with learning difficulties and more-able students, by ensuring that
  - data on students' performance, together with assessment activities in lessons, is used to re-shape activities and tasks in line with students' abilities and needs
  - teachers check thoroughly the knowledge and skills acquired by students.
  
- Develop strategies for promoting literacy and language across the curriculum that enable students to develop independent learning skills and the ability to self-correct their written work.
  
- Develop greater capacity at middle leadership level so that middle leaders become leaders of learning and help teachers accelerate the progress of their students in lessons.

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

Meena Wood  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**