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Mrs B Pierpoint  
Principal  
North East Wolverhampton Academy  
Marsh Lane  
Fordhouses  
Wolverhampton  
West Midlands  
WV10 6SE

Dear Mrs Pierpoint

## **Academies initiative: monitoring inspection of North East Wolverhampton Academy**

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Kevin Sheldrick, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 2–3 May 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 22 parts of lessons, other aspects of the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, members of staff, a representative of the academy trust and groups of students. There was a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Governing Body.

### **Context**

The Principal was appointed as Principal Designate in April 2010 and the academy opened in September 2010 on the sites of two predecessor schools. For its first year of operation the student cohorts of each of these schools remained on the original premises. From September 2011 a distinction has been made: students in Years 7 and 8, sixth form students and the Year 11 students originally from one of the predecessor schools are based on the Northwood Campus. Years 9 and 10 students

and those Year 11 students from the second predecessor school are based on the Foxley Campus. Sixth form provision is currently shared with four partner schools; an arrangement in place since before the academy's opening.

Since its opening, a major re-structure of staffing has taken place and 27 members of staff have left the academy. While some of the senior leaders have remained in post since the time of the academy's opening, there have been personnel changes to seven of the eleven senior roles. A vice-principal responsible for 'Climate for Learning' took up post in April 2012.

The number on roll is higher than the average-sized secondary school. Most students are from White British backgrounds with the remainder being from a range of backgrounds including Indian and Caribbean. There is a much higher than average proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals. A broadly average proportion of students are identified as disabled or with special educational needs.

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

The progress of students, and groups of students, as observed in lessons during this inspection was broadly satisfactory. In some lessons, there was good progress. There was evidence of students applying reading, writing and communication skills satisfactorily, although this was not a consistent feature of lessons. Attitudes to learning are variable and when these are poor or no more than satisfactory, students' progress slows. Academy leaders have good systems in place to ensure that they can establish whether the progress observed in an individual lesson is being continued over time. They are aware that, over time, progress is too inconsistent.

Validated data from 2011 indicate that the progress students, and groups of students, made from their starting points was variable. Although it was below average in English and mathematics, students' performance was better than in the larger of the two predecessor schools. Current rates of progress for Year 11 students are quicker in mathematics, suggesting that, overall, they are making broadly satisfactory progress in this subject. Progress in English is also improving but, over time, it remains below average overall and a cause for concern. The progress of students supported at school action has been variable, and a range of support has been put in place to address this, some of which have already had a positive impact.

There was a notable improvement in students' attainment at the end of the academy's first year of operation, with 49% of students achieving five GCSEs including English and mathematics at grade C or above. Although overall attainment is low when compared to national averages, the gap is narrowing. In 2011, the gap between those students known to be eligible for free school meals in the academy and those who were not, was smaller than was the case nationally. Attainment in subjects other than English and mathematics varied from below to broadly average. In some subjects, all with relatively small cohorts of students, attainment was above average. Attainment in the sixth form improved in 2011.

The academy's accurate tracking data, the results of examinations already taken and observations during the visit indicate that, within this general trend of improving attainment, there are significant variations. Attainment in English and mathematics remains below average.

### **The quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching has improved since the academy opened. There is now less that is inadequate and an increase in the proportion of good teaching. Too much, however, remains satisfactory. When teaching is good, teachers use their subject knowledge well and offer clear explanations and guidance on how students need to improve in the subject. These features, and the positive relationships that exist within classrooms, mean that students are able to learn quickly. In the strongest lessons, the choice of resources helps to engage students as well as modelling the process of learning. For example, in a Year 9 mathematics lesson the teacher used the interactive whiteboard well to show the process of simplifying expressions.

Weaker features of teaching includes lesson planning that fails to meet the needs of students of all abilities within a class; and the lack of attention to ensuring that students understand how their learning can be developed in individual subjects. Weaker teaching is also characterised by questioning that is not sufficiently targeted and too often relies on willing volunteers rather than being inclusive of all students. Even when teaching is stronger there are missed opportunities to make good use of assessment to help students gain insights into how to improve. Too many lessons allow students to be passive, therefore missing opportunities for them to develop as independent learners.

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

Most students were generally positive about improvements to behaviour and the learning environment. They understood what it meant to be bullied and were reasonably confident that bullying would be dealt with if it occurred. Students did, however, speak of inconsistencies in students' attitudes towards different teachers and the ways in which teachers managed these. This matched the evidence observed by inspectors, including some examples of inadequate behaviour due to low-level disruption in lessons.

When behaviour in lessons was no better than satisfactory it was often linked to students' unenthusiastic attitudes rather than low-level disruption or open defiance. Subsequently, opportunities for paired and group work did not result in good learning. Poor attitudes were evident even in some lessons where teachers had planned the activities to engage and stimulate the students. Academy leaders have used a variety of strategies to promote positive attitudes to learning and raise aspirations, which have made a difference. However, they acknowledge that there is more to do and have plans in place to do so. Conduct around the site during the inspection was broadly satisfactory with some that was good.

Good analysis of attendance patterns means that academy leaders have been able to reduce persistent absenteeism, although this remains higher than is the case nationally. Current overall attendance is low, with some variation between year groups and groups of students. There is no complacency about this and there are systematic approaches in place to tackle poor attendance with obvious links to raising aspirations and promoting more positive attitudes to learning. Exclusion rates have risen in the second year of the academy's operation, in part due to developing consistency in behaviour management across the two sites and an increase in expectations. At the time of the inspection, disabled students and those with special educational needs were over-represented in exclusion figures.

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

Academy leaders have had to deal with a very challenging situation of bringing together two distinct school communities to ensure that the vision of 'one academy' is realised. This strong vision is articulated and led very well by the Principal. Significant progress has been made in establishing a common structure and ethos across the two sites. A radical restructure of staffing at all levels and the development of performance management for staff demonstrate the sharp focus on accountability for students' performance. A review of the identification of and provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs is being undertaken. Leadership of teaching and learning is making a difference, as seen in the improving profile of the quality of teaching and in the work of trainee teachers.

There has been a relentless focus on achievement of students in all subjects. The impact of this is evident in the rising levels of students' attainment and their increasing rates of progress. There has, however, been variability in these aspects, in part linked to the effectiveness of middle leadership. Academy leaders analyse in detail all aspects of students' academic progress and personal development, including that of groups of students, which means that support is beginning to narrow gaps in attainment. This analysis, and feedback from students, also means that changes are being made to the Key Stage 4 curriculum so that it better matches students' needs and interests. For instance, students who have not yet achieved their target grades in English and mathematics are experiencing a 'carousel' of lessons focused on specific aspects of the approaching examinations, taught by teachers with particular expertise.

Leaders have been proactive in making changes to provision in the sixth form. An external review gave a clear focus on the next steps and actions taken are addressing these and developing the culture of this key stage. Leaders in the sixth form have correctly identified that teaching in this phase needs to ensure students consistently know their current levels of attainment and what they must do to achieve their targets.

Self-evaluation is searching, honest and accurate and this has resulted in plans for development that are well matched to the needs of the academy. Leaders rightly

celebrate successes since opening, such as in the increase in students' achievement and the increasing consistency across both sites. However, they are well aware that there is much still to do to ensure that current vulnerabilities in relation to aspects of students' outcomes, notably in progress levels, attendance and aspects of students' behaviour, are addressed. Relatively recent appointments to the academy's senior leadership team to lead on aspects of excellence in English and mathematics and developing the climate for learning have already made a difference, but there has not been time for this work to have had a full impact. These strengths, as well as the impact leaders have already had in raising attainment means that there is a clear capacity to improve.

Members of the governing body and the academy trust board hold academy leaders to account well. They ask searching questions, challenge reasons for decisions and underperformance as well as supporting the Principal once decisions have been made.

### **External support**

A wide range of external support has been used to supplement the existing capacity within the academy leadership. Organisations, including academy sponsors, have had a good impact on developing leadership, identifying strengths and weaknesses in curriculum areas and offering in-class support to develop the quality of teaching. In addition, an organisation has completed a programme of work to develop the integration into one academy of both students and staff from the two predecessor schools. Work with other outstanding academies has been established, for example to help the development of sixth form provision.

### **Main Judgements**

The academy has made satisfactory progress towards raising standards.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Raise attainment in all subjects and increase rates of progress for all groups of students, particularly in English, by improving the quality of day-to-day teaching and ensuring a better match of the curriculum to the students' needs.
- Increase the proportion of good teaching that supports better progress over time by ensuring that:
  - teachers plan lessons to meet the needs of students of different ability within each class
  - students are given more opportunities to develop as independent learners
  - all lessons promote a positive climate for learning.

- Improve attendance of all groups of students by ensuring there are effective strategies in place to do so.

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

**James McNeillie**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**