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Ms N Robinson  
Principal  
Ipswich Academy  
Lindbergh Road  
Ipswich  
IP3 9PZ

Dear Ms Robinson

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

### **Introduction**

Following my visit with Alan Alder, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your academy on 22–23 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 the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal, groups of students, four representatives from the governing body including a representative of the sponsors, and several groups of staff and managers. Inspectors paid careful attention to students' written work and teachers' evaluations of students' attainment and progress.

## **Context**

The academy is one of three within the Learning Schools Trust which is sponsored by the Kunskapsskolen education group. Most teaching staff transferred from the predecessor school to the academy at its formation in March 2011. There has recently been a substantial change in the staffing of core subjects with new appointments starting in September. The entire senior management team including the Principal are new in post.

The academy is smaller than average, with 890 students on roll. The large majority of students are White British. The academy has a high proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion with disabilities or with special educational needs supported by school action plus or by statements of special educational needs is much higher than average. A significant number of students join the school at times of year other than the normal start dates. The academy is coming to the end of its first year of developing a sixth form, with 57 students in Year 12 who will progress to the new Year 13 next year. Indications are that recruitment to the sixth form will increase for September. The academy is due to move into new premises in September 2013.

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

Attainment on entry to the academy is much lower than national average, especially in aspects of literacy. Nationally published end of Key Stage 4 data available shortly after the academy was formed refers to the performance of the predecessor school. These data indicate low attainment, with the proportion attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C being well below national average though with some improvement in attainment in English. The academy's own monitoring data indicate that this year's GCSE cohort will improve a little on last year, especially in English, but will remain well below the national average. Indications are that the current Year 10 is on track to attain higher standards.

The progress observed by inspectors in class did not always match the school's evaluation. Inspectors carefully scrutinised written work from a significant sample of students across Key Stage 3, in both mathematics and English. This confirmed that inaccuracies exist in teachers' monitoring of attainment, especially in Year 9. These inaccuracies are more marked in English than in mathematics.

Progress is inadequate for all groups of students including those who are disabled or who have special educational needs. For too many, there has been little improvement over time. The quality of written work produced is often poor. Inspectors observed some classes in which the level of what was being taught was too low, with students undertaking work that they were already capable of doing. This resulted in very weak learning and lost opportunities and time.

In a few classes, this was not the case and inspectors observed examples where good progress was being made, for example in physical education, in a science class, as well as examples in mathematics.

Many changes are being introduced by the Principal and management team. A new ethos in which students take responsibility for their own learning and receive regular, frequent monitoring of progress and target setting is being introduced. These changes are not yet consistently embedded across the academy. As part of these changes, a greater emphasis is being placed on behavioural support, and a new intervention centre is showing some signs of providing effective and structured learning for those students who are referred to it. In addition, an accelerated reader programme has been implemented recently, but it is too soon to judge the impact.

### **The quality of teaching**

Inspectors agree with the academy leaders' judgements about teaching. Some teaching is good or outstanding. Although it is improving, however, there is still too much that is inadequate. In good or better lessons, there is clarity about what students are to learn. This ensures that students remain focussed and that the teaching and questioning are well judged and so brings about the required learning. In these lessons, there are good relationships between students and their teachers, and the learning proceeds at a good pace. In a good science lesson, for example, the students worked very quickly to set up and test electrical circuits in order to further their understanding of voltage and current. Their work was accurate and they made good progress. The teacher's regular reminders of the time students needed to be taking for the tasks was effective in bringing about a good pace of learning. In the very best classes, accurate assessment is used to carefully structure the learning so that those who may be finding a topic difficult make the most progress and catch up. In these classes, teachers are responsive to the effectiveness of students' learning, modifying their approach where necessary.

In too many lessons, though, this good practice is absent. In some, there is no clear information about what students should be learning. As a result, little progress is made. Teachers' questions are not used to assess students' understanding so that it could be improved if necessary. This is because most questions are asked of those who volunteer to answer. Marking is infrequent and too often it is cursory. Some inadequate work in science that displayed very little effort was marked with the comment 'well done'. However, in another science lesson, the teacher's marking was exemplary, albeit infrequent, giving very detailed advice to the students to help them understand the work. Many students do not undertake sufficient independent study to enable them to make good progress, sometimes not being clear how to access the academy's online learning portal.

As a result of infrequent marking, students' work is often scruffy, poorly organised and frequently incomplete.

Where work is stored on a computer, students' files are sometimes not well organised so that students are unable to retrieve the work and so have to do it again. In lessons where there is additional support for some students, this is generally effective and helps those who need it to achieve. The academy has introduced detailed tracking to monitor the level of attainment that students reach.

The academy has implemented a system of individual tutorial sessions. Many students value these and some talk positively of the help and guidance that they are given. However, this view is not consistently held. Too often, tutors' written comments are insufficiently precise or detailed to be helpful.

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

Students' behaviour varies significantly. Where teaching is good, students behave well and make good progress. In lessons in which teaching is inadequate, behaviour is often inadequate and attitudes to learning poor. On entry, skills of independent learning are weak. The academy recognises the importance of improving this so that students take responsibility for their own learning. Around the academy, behaviour is generally satisfactory and is safe. The rate of exclusions has increased this year, partly as a consequence of a lower tolerance of poor behaviour. Attendance and punctuality have improved because of the school's effective multi-agency work and renewed emphasis on attendance. Persistent absence remains high, although the academy has halted the increasing trend.

Students understand the system of sanctions for poor behaviour but they state that the management of behaviour varies too much between individual staff because the rules are inconsistently applied. Students say that they prefer ordered classes where the teachers have good control of the group, but this does not always happen. Many students said that behaviour had improved during the last year.

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

Senior management and governance are strong but have not yet had time to have a marked impact on the quality of provision or achievement. Although there are early signs of improvement, students experience too much inadequate teaching that has an adverse impact on their progress.

The Principal, senior leaders and governing body have a very clear and purposeful vision for the direction and future development of the academy. They bring much experience to their role. Self-assessment and development plans are sufficiently self-critical and clear. Actions for improvement are challenging but realistic, with appropriate timescales, but are not consistently translated into improvement actions at subject level. Senior leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy and are tackling the weaknesses through performance management, recruitment, and reallocation of roles.

This is being aided by specialist support from the academy sponsor in key areas that include English, and teaching and learning. Despite the legacy of inadequate teaching, senior leaders are demonstrating the capacity to address weaknesses. The academy is demonstrating good multi-agency working and, as a result, attendance and behaviour have improved.

The academy is, rightly, putting much effort into the improvement of teaching and learning. Lesson observations identify where teaching is strong and the areas where development is needed. There are regular whole-school professional development sessions, with plans to increase their frequency and tailor them more closely to issues identified in class. However, the monitoring system places a disproportionate emphasis on the activities of teachers rather than the learning of students. The use of management information and online documentation reporting students' progress has improved considerably. Managers and teachers now have good access to records for individual students or groups.

The academy is moving towards an integrated curriculum model in Key Stage 3. Whilst there is evidence to suggest that students enjoy this approach, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that it is improving learning. Recent changes have been made to improve intervention support. Individuals receive specialist support and close monitoring of progress in a dedicated area of the building. Although it is too early to demonstrate this progress, students welcome the facilities that it has to offer.

Improvement planning at whole-school and strategic level is good. However, its implementation at subject level is incomplete and inconsistent across departments and subjects. Too much variation in the quality of provision exists between subjects. Examples include the quality of marking, the accuracy of assessment, the regularity of homework, the consistency of implementation of behaviour policies, and the quality of teaching. The monitoring of these important aspects of students' experiences is ineffective. Students expressed concerns about these variations.

### **External support**

The academy council, the local sub-committee of the Learning Schools Trust Board, gives a good strategic direction and the academy is receiving extensive support from partner schools at curriculum and subject level. Regular visits and external reviews are helping to improve the quality of education provided. Although it is too soon for sustained improvements to be apparent in performance data, there are indications of improving teaching and the momentum for improvement is building.

### **Main Judgements**

The academy has made inadequate progress towards raising standards.

## **Priorities for further improvement**

In order to raise attainment and progress;

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is at least good by including the use of clear learning objectives and by ensuring consistency in the application of behaviour policies and assessment.
- Improve the quality and regularity of marking of written work, including independent work, so that students have a clearer idea of how to improve their learning.
- Improve the effectiveness and accountability of middle leaders in driving up standards in their subject areas through the monitoring of the work of their departments and students' learning and in implementing whole-school policies and targets.

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

Ian Seath  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**