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2 September 2013

Mr Marcus Barker  
Principal  
Ashcroft Technology Academy  
100 West Hill  
London  
SW15 2UT

Dear Mr Barker

### **No formal designation monitoring inspection of Ashcroft Technology Academy**

Following my visit with Anne Duffy, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Anne Pepper and Jalil Shaika, Additional Inspectors, to your academy on 30 April and 1 May 2013, 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 monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures, and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out because the Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of leadership and management, in relation to behaviour and safeguarding at the academy.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the Principal and other senior leaders, heads of year, support staff including mentors, a youth worker, and members of staff on the anti-bullying committee. Telephone interviews were conducted with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body. Staff and seven groups of students met with inspectors and shared their views about behaviour and safety in the academy. Inspectors also spoke to individual students and groups of students informally. Discussions were held with a range of partners including the educational psychologist, school nurse and police community support officer, the child protection officer for the local authority, and the member of staff

responsible for developing links with Trident<sup>1</sup>. The views of parents were taken into consideration through a panel meeting and individual telephone interviews. The responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire) and a recent academy-based survey that involved over a third of the parents were also considered. In addition, visits were made to a few retailers and the local tube station used by many students, to seek additional views about students' behaviour. Short visits were made to 34 lessons.

Ofsted received an anonymous letter raising concerns about the behaviour and safety of students at the academy. Having carried out a wide range of evidence gathering activities, the inspection team found no evidence to corroborate such concerns.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

The academy's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and the academy is taking effective action to promote students' good behaviour.

## **Context**

The academy is much larger than the average-sized secondary school. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is high. The largest ethnic groups are of White British, Asian, and African and/or Caribbean heritage. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well above average. The proportion of students for whom the academy receives additional funding through the pupil premium is high. While the proportion of students supported at school action plus is well above average, the proportion supported at school action or through a statement of special education needs is broadly average. Very few students join or leave the academy partway through their secondary school education. Staffing is stable and there have been few changes since the section 5 inspection in 2010. Following the promotion of a deputy principal, a new deputy principal was appointed in 2012.

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

Attainment remains well above average at the end of Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In the lessons visited, almost all students worked diligently and made good progress. Students were keen to answer questions, participate in activities and demonstrate how much they enjoy being challenged. For example, in English, Year 10 students demonstrated creativity when evaluating and grading each other's work. Students explored topics including race, gender and safety by role-playing characters

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<sup>1</sup> Trident is an independent advisory group that works with the Metropolitan Police Service. Its aim is to tackle gang crime by working with different partners, including schools. The PSHE curriculum covers topics on gang crime and the youth justice system.

from Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. In some instances, their presentation was exemplary such as when they used drama to satirise gender and safety.

### **The quality of teaching**

In the lessons observed, teachers' subject knowledge and enthusiasm helped to create a positive, enjoyable environment where students were very keen to learn. Year 11 students who had previously been reprimanded for poor behaviour spoke about a 'passion for learning'. Inspectors confirmed the views of students that effective teaching leads to them 'enjoying learning' and that 'teachers make every effort to engage them to exceed their targets.' Students say that the good quality of teaching and marking helps them understand how well they are achieving.

Other good features of teaching observed included skilful questioning to probe and develop students' understanding, opportunities for students to review and evaluate each other's work, collaborative work, and the use of discussion to explore ideas. All of this was underpinned by respectful communication between staff and students.

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

The behaviour of students in lessons and around the site is very good. Students know, understand and apply the code of conduct because they agree with the academy's high expectations of behaviour, and their relationships with staff and each other are mature and harmonious. This was evident in the way students worked or socialised together, both in and out of lessons, and confirmed by the students who spoke to inspectors.

Students were emphatic about the fact that they feel safe in the academy and would enthusiastically recommend it to others. This message comes across strongly in a comment from a sixth-form student, who said that 'they really go the extra mile to make sure we are safe... nothing is left to chance'. Feedback from parents also supports these views.

From as early as Year 7, students are given opportunities to show leadership skills. They seize the opportunities given to act as year leaders, peer mentors or prefects. They are enthusiastic about taking part in activities, representing their views and supporting others who might be more vulnerable. They are very confident that any rare incidences of bullying that may occur are dealt with swiftly, sensitively and decisively. Students expressed strong moral values about fighting and bullying. They were very clear that a gang culture does not exist or influence behaviour in their academy, and were dismissive about such a negative overtone. Students know that they cannot bring their 'outside life' or disputes into the academy because all know that their 'priority is to learn.'

Above-average attendance and the low exclusion rate for all groups of students reflect the views of students that they enjoy learning at the academy. While a very small minority of students sometimes find the academy's sanctions policy and 'no

excuses culture' difficult, they speak highly about the quality of care, guidance and support provided. Individual students acknowledge how much the deterrents help them to reshape their lives and focus on their education.

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

Inspectors were fully satisfied that effective arrangements are in place for safeguarding students at the academy. Safeguarding matters are kept under review by the governing body and students are consulted about feeling safe in the academy. Leaders and all staff at all levels have a very good understanding of the needs of students and make every attempt to meet them.

The leadership group works closely with the governing body. Together, senior leaders check regularly to ensure that all students are kept safe and are very well cared for. The leadership group members have a good balance of skills across a range of safeguarding functions. Consequently, safeguarding policies and procedures are thorough, and are used consistently on a day-to-day basis to protect students. No concern is considered too small or insignificant. Staff are very clear about their roles when investigating incidences of misbehaviour and the follow-up that is required. There is a clear chain of command that extends from support staff and form tutors to the leadership group, including the governors and trustees. Staff are thorough in their record-keeping and in passing on information. Complaints are dealt with quickly and efficiently. Records show that the academy has received six complaints since the last inspection. Only one of these was about a safeguarding matter, and it was dealt with appropriately.

The academy is proactive in preventing bullying incidents and in seeking a positive resolution when incidents do occur. The anti-bullying committee, which operated during 2012, provided a good forum to discuss and develop key actions to empower students to speak out. The committee was replaced by a 'restorative justice' group and there is now a new approach to raising concerns. However, although the new approach is effective, the changes were not made clear enough to all parties before the anti-bullying committee was disbanded.

Leaders have very clear expectations for behaviour. While there is a good balance of rewards and sanctions, boundaries are spelt out and students know the consequences of unacceptable behaviour. Leaders and staff are highly visible throughout the school day. Parents appreciate this approach, and also like the policy that bans students from bringing mobile phones and other valuables to school, primarily because it improves their safety in school and the community. The well-established Inclusive Care and Support unit (ICAS) is staffed by specialist workers and provides exceptionally good support for students. The ICAS unit successfully contributes to students reshaping their attitudes and taking responsibility for their behaviour. Intensive work with students who exhibit unacceptable behaviour contributes to very few returning to ICAS a second time. The personal, social and health education curriculum continues to provide excellent opportunities to promote

safeguarding topics. However, not enough attention is given to evaluating the impact of this work.

The academy uses specialist staff and a very good range of systems to tackle concerns or potential concerns – whether internal or external – that could affect students' lives. These systems are well considered and are successfully used as a deterrent. For example, effective mentoring ensures that vulnerable students in the Additional Resource Unit are very well cared for. Staff are vigilant when monitoring attendance, and appropriate steps are taken in accordance with statutory child protection guidance if any student is missing their education.

Parents are very supportive and say that the strict discipline code and emphasis on high achievement are their main reasons for selecting the academy for their children. Parents also appreciate the academy's approach to creating and sustaining a learning environment that is safe and secure, and meets the needs of their children.

### **External support**

The academy has ensured that students and families are at the centre of its work in tackling barriers to learning. Well-established links with a wide range of services are enabling leaders to engage in partnerships and work with multi-agency groups.

### **Priorities for further improvement**

- Develop communications at all levels so that:
  - all staff are aware of what happens to victims who have experienced bullying
  - parents are aware of the actions taken to safeguard students
  - external services are kept well informed about the impact of their work and the links with other providers.
  
- Evaluate the impact of work carried out, in order to identify strengths and next steps for further improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**