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Steve Elliott  
Principal  
Wrenn Academy  
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Dear Mr Elliott

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Wrenn Academy**

Following my visit to your academy on 14 January 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and the academy trust, The Education Fellowship, are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good academy.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with the Chief Executive Officer and the Academy Outcome Director of The Education Fellowship, the chair of the academy advisory board, yourself, senior and middle leaders to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The Assistant Principal took me on a tour of one of the academy sites and you took me on a tour of the other, where we saw the learning that was taking place. I evaluated the academy development plan, other planning documents, and documents relating to the academy's evaluation of its progress on the journey to become good.

### **Context**

Since the last inspection, around 30 teaching staff have left the academy and been replaced by a mixture of permanent and supply staff. Some key subject leaders are, consequently, new to their roles.

## **Main findings**

The Education Fellowship Trust has not ensured that the senior leaders have developed a structured and systematic approach to the improvement tasks ahead. Despite predictions that 48% of pupils in Year 11 in 2015 would achieve five or more good grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, the academy, again, did not reach the government's minimum expectation that 40% will reach this benchmark. Senior leaders acknowledge that their predictions were seriously flawed.

The challenges faced by the academy are many and complex. Managing the high staff turnover has understandably taken a lot of time and management resource.

Two different planning systems are in place, neither of which is sufficiently sharp or clear to be effective. There is no overarching plan setting out the priorities for improvement. The 'twenty-five-day plan' prepared for the Education Fellowship Trust serves as a useful calendar of proposed activities, but offers little more. The academy's development plan was rewritten in the autumn term of 2015, but targets and success criteria are not linked to the activities it contains and actions are not always linked to the expected impact. Timescales are not clear. While systems are in place for monitoring whether actions have been undertaken or not, the outcome of actions and impact of the academy's work are not evaluated systematically.

Some areas of the academy's work are referenced in The Educational Fellowship's 'Quarterly Review' and some of these are evaluated in terms of quantifiable evidence. The 'Quarterly Review' does not, however, reference the academy's planning document systematically, so that not all aspects of the senior leadership team's work are considered properly. No one, therefore, has a clear idea of the progress made against the academy's targets and senior leaders are not properly held to account for their work.

The academy's self-evaluation document is not fit for purpose. Too much comment is based on aspiration and planned activities and too little reflects the actual impact of actions on the progress made by the academy. It reads too generously, therefore, in many areas.

The Education Fellowship Trust requires academy Principals to complete a daily log. This four-page paper document was onerous to complete and it is not clear to you what benefit it served. The trust has not reviewed the contents for some time, nor has it drawn conclusions from the process, which has fallen into disuse. I agree that the time could be better used on other matters.

The consequence of these failures of planning and evaluation is that, while many initiatives are taking place and senior leaders are working hard and with strong purpose and vision, it is not clear how effective their work is.

Following the failure of academy leaders to predict GCSE outcomes accurately last summer, considerable effort has been expended to improve data systems and teachers' understanding and use of data. Leaders assert that their assessment data are now more robust, as they derive from internally moderated assessments and test papers. However, the accuracy of teachers' assessment has not been verified externally. Senior leaders predict that pupils' attainment in GCSE examinations will be better this summer, although they acknowledge continued concerns about the rate of progress made by pupils in English and in mathematics.

New systems are in place to hold middle leaders to account for progress in their subjects, especially in respect of Year 11. The middle leaders with whom I spoke welcome these systems and feel empowered to drive improvement in their subject areas. They feel more confident with data and understand the importance of securing better progress for their pupils. Nevertheless, despite close work with the Vice Principal, they have not yet developed fully into their leadership roles, for example by meeting deadlines for the completion of actions, or by taking full responsibility for the quality of teaching in their departments.

The pace of improvement in teaching and learning is too slow. There is a lack of clarity about the leadership of this important area for improvement. While those responsible have a sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the practice of individual teachers, there is no shared understanding at the academy of what good teaching looks like. There are also no clear expectations of teachers. The senior leader with whom I spoke expressed concerns about the quality of teaching of just less than half of the teaching staff, but only around 10% are currently receiving coaching. While this coaching is likely to be helpful, it is not set up with clear success criteria against which an individual's progress is checked.

The head of sixth form has developed systems that use assessment data to help subject and pastoral teams to discuss the effectiveness of learning. These systems enable staff to keep closer checks on learners' progress. Lesson observations in the sixth form are regular and there is a helpful evaluation of where strengths and weaknesses in teaching lie.

Safeguarding practices continue to be secure. Senior leaders are cultivating an approach where even small concerns are logged and reviewed to ensure that little is missed. Staff training is up to date for all but the most-recent joiners (and that training was due take place within a few days of this visit). Appropriate checks have been made on staff.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the academy until its next section 5 inspection. Because I have serious concerns about the quality of external support and the progress made by the academy, I am recommending to Ofsted's Regional Director for the East Midlands that the next section 5 inspection of the academy is brought forward.

## **External support**

The academy leaders have valued the support offered by the trust's former Director of Education. However, the trust has not been effective in ensuring that one single helpful system is in place to create a clear strategic plan for the academy, or to provide robust evaluations of the actions within it. As a result, the trust is not well equipped to support the academy or to hold its leaders to account.

The academy's website is not clear how the substantial monies allocated to the academy for use to improve the achievement of pupils from poor backgrounds will be used and how effective the different activities that it funded last year were. It is recommended, therefore, that an external review of the use of the pupil premium funding is undertaken.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire, the Education Funding Agency and the Regional Schools Commissioner.

Yours sincerely

Emma Ing  
**Senior Her Majesty's Inspector**