



3 November 2006

Mr I Brew (Principal)  
Trinity Academy  
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Dear Mr Brew

## ACADEMIES INITIATIVE: MONITORING VISIT TO TRINITY ACADEMY

### Introduction

Following my visit with Cathy Kirby HMI and Michael McIlroy HMI to your academy on 1 and 2 November, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was a first monitoring visit in connection with the academies initiative.

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### Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work, scrutinised documents and met with the principal and other staff and groups of students; the director of schools of the Emmanuel Foundation was interviewed on a video link. The findings of recent attitudinal surveys of staff, students and parents were taken into account.

### Context

There are 1207 students on roll at Trinity Academy, including 126 in the sixth form. Boys slightly outnumber girls in most year groups except in the sixth form. About one student in six is entitled to free school meals, which is broadly average compared with all secondary schools. Just under one in six students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and about 2% of students have a statement of special educational need; both figures are broadly average. Only 2% of students belong to minority ethnic groups, none

of whom are at an early stage of learning English. About one quarter of the teaching staff joined the academy at the start of this school year; almost one half of current teachers transferred to the academy from the predecessor school and seven in ten of the non-teaching staff also made this move.

## Achievement and Standards

The immediate impact of the academy has been to improve standards and raise the expectations and aspirations of staff and students. A range of strategies introduced during the transition year successfully raised attainment at both key stages from a previous low base. In 2005 there was a significant increase in the proportion of 14-year-olds achieving the expected levels in English, mathematics and science. The provisional results for 2006 show that the academy did well to sustain this pattern despite a weaker cohort of Year 9 students. In 2006 at Key Stage 4 the proportion of students gaining five GCSE passes at grades A\* to C, and the proportion gaining five such grades including English and mathematics, exceeded targets. However, the proportion of 16-year-olds achieving five passes at grades A\* to G remained intractably low at 84%. At Key Stage 5 the average points score per student increased in 2006. However, inspectors did not see sufficient sixth form provision to evaluate current standards of achievement.

Students make satisfactory progress in lessons. Significant improvements in behaviour have enabled teachers to teach and students to learn more effectively. However, much remains to be done in eradicating the residual underachievement that is a legacy of former inadequacies in provision. The academy has robust plans to raise standards further and has set challenging targets for 2007 at all key stages.

## Personal development and well-being

The academy's strong Christian ethos, underpinned by its seven core values, permeates its work and develops well students' spiritual, moral and social awareness. The academy acknowledges that students' cultural awareness is less well developed. The promotion of good behaviour has been a key priority for the academy; behaviour is rigorously monitored and is now good overall. The behaviour policy is clear and rigorously applied. Students confirm that there has been a significant improvement in behaviour since the academy opened and appreciate the benefits of the focus on good behaviour. Students move around sensibly, and are generally polite and courteous to

visitors. In the year following the academy's opening, effective use was made of an internal pupil referral unit to tackle the most disaffected students and to reintegrate them into the academy, mostly with success. Recently, the academy has adopted a more inclusive approach and now seeks to tackle disaffection at an earlier stage. This also has proved successful.

Students' attitudes to learning are satisfactory overall and sometimes good. However, a senior leader's view that teachers often work harder than students, who sometimes lack application or enthusiasm, was confirmed in lessons visited by inspectors. In a very few lessons, the pace of progress is impeded by low-level disruption, caused in part by some students' lack of engagement with their learning. Attendance has improved and is now average. The efforts of the academy attendance officer, relentless monitoring and good links with the education welfare service provided by the local authority (LA) have contributed to this. There is a higher than average proportion of unauthorised absences, partly explained by the academy's refusal to authorise holidays taken in term time.

Students are proud of their new surroundings and facilities; those interviewed were enthusiastic about new opportunities the academy offers them. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, some of which encourage students to perform in front of an audience and so develop their self-esteem and confidence. While there is no academy council, students' views are increasingly gathered through ways such as consultation with prefects and the recently introduced suggestions box. Students have some opportunities to exercise responsibility; younger students show visitors around and older students act as house captains, prefects and peer mentors and assist staff at break times. There are opportunities for students to make positive contributions to the local community, such as charity fund-raising and participation in a community service programme.

### Quality of provision

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. This view concurs entirely with that of senior leaders, as does inspectors' evaluation of strengths and weaknesses in classroom practice. Teaching was satisfactory or better in 20 of the 22 part-lessons observed, including eight in which it was good. Teaching was inadequate in two lessons as a result of weak planning that resulted in too slow a pace, too much teacher talk and insufficient checks on the progress of students' learning. The quality of learning lagged slightly

behind the quality of teaching, largely as a result of some students' indifferent attitudes and insufficient opportunities for them to engage actively in their learning.

Improving the quality of teaching and learning is a priority for senior leaders; this is clearly understood by staff. A structured approach to sharing good practice within the academy and between other academies in the Foundation has been effective. In the best lessons, relationships were good and classroom management was effective. Students settled quickly to their work. Lesson objectives were shared in a helpful way and regular checks were made to see what students had learned so that most made good progress. In these lessons, the academy's emphasis on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) is having a positive impact on raising standards. In some satisfactory lessons, teachers were reluctant to give students sufficient responsibility for their own learning; some have yet to develop the strategies to enable them to do so. The principal weaknesses in teaching are the inadequate development of students' independent learning skills and an inconsistent approach to lesson planning. Some teachers do not use assessment information well enough to plan lessons that meet fully the needs of the least able students in the class while challenging the most able.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the students' needs. In addition to a strong focus on English, mathematics and science, key features are the emphasis on core courses in business, information technology and enterprise (BITE), which is the academy's specialism, and philosophy, theology and ethics (PTE). The taught curriculum is complemented by an appropriate use of homework, which has been given high priority since the opening of the academy.

The academy has worked hard to establish effective assessment systems for tracking the progress of students, predicting results and setting challenging targets. However, there are some inconsistencies in the quality of marking; too little identifies the next steps students should take in order to improve. The academy recognises that this is an area for development.

### Leadership and management

The principal provides very good leadership and is ably supported by his colleagues in promoting the academy's core values. Staff and students alike appreciate senior leaders' consistent articulation of this vision and of its

realisation in the daily life and work of the academy: 'That is how we judge ourselves and our decisions... the core values are threaded through everything we do,' explained one senior leader. Expectations of staff and students are high; the overarching agenda for raising the quality of teaching and learning and hence for improving standards has led to decisive action, for example, in abandoning the faculty structure and enhancing the role of individual departmental heads with direct accountability to the senior leadership team. Middle managers have received training for their new responsibilities and are already forming accurate views of strengths and areas for development within their subjects. They are beginning to form a cohesive group that has the potential to raise standards through direct involvement in, and influence on, classroom practice.

Senior leaders know the academy very well. They make an effective team with varied styles and complementary strengths. While each member has specific responsibilities, each also has a good overview of the academy's development and can identify where much has been achieved and where change or development are still required. Across the team, there is very good capacity to drive further improvement. All aspects of the academy's work are scrutinised regularly and thoroughly by senior leaders. The academy development plan identifies appropriate priorities and actions to achieve them. Although the ongoing evaluation of the plan's implementation shows that available data are used rigorously to measure the progress made, many success criteria lack quantifiable detail. The academy has put together an impressive database including feedback from students, staff and parents as well as analyses of students' achievement and progress, lesson observations and scrutinies of students' work. Significant messages from these data are not sufficiently used to strengthen success criteria within the development plan or to provide a strong, evidence-based self-evaluation of the academy's progress.

### External support

The expertise and financial support of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust during and since the academy's transitional period have been instrumental in enabling improvements in previously underperforming subject areas such as engineering and ICT. Funding from this source also allowed GCSE coursework sessions to be held during the Easter holidays so that students could complete or improve submissions and thus raise their eventual grades. The Emmanuel Foundation has encouraged the sharing of resources and experiences, notably with The King's Academy, as well as providing expertise in areas such as financial and buildings management and legal matters. The Foundation's director of schools has been a much valued adviser and mentor to the principal. Trinity Academy has forged a positive and

productive relationship with Doncaster LA; its school improvement service and curriculum advisers have provided high quality support focused on raising standards. The principal attends meetings of LA headteachers, and works closely with the headteacher of the neighbouring comprehensive school in managing student transfers and planning future joint curriculum provision. A school improvement partner began work with the academy at the start of this term.

Trinity Academy takes very seriously its responsibility to add value to its community. Mutually beneficial partnerships have been established with local sporting clubs, youth organisations and businesses; academy events, including music and dance productions, are popular with parents and friends. The local community, including the police, are reported to be particularly appreciative of the academy's policy of allowing only sixth form students into town at lunchtime, and of general improvements in the behaviour of young people in the immediate area.

### Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that individual lessons are planned in sufficient detail to make best use of the time available and allow for the accurate assessment of all students' progress
- Improve opportunities for students to extend independent learning skills and to become more involved in the development of the academy
- Compile a self-evaluation that draws on the academy's development plan and database to present a sharp, coherent analysis of the current context and priorities for improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chairman of directors and the Academies Group at the DfES.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Bennett  
HM Inspector of Schools