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Mr Devon Hanson  
Principal  
Walworth Academy  
Shorncliffe Road  
London  
SE1 5UJ

Dear Mr Hanson

Academies initiative: monitoring visit to Walworth Academy

## Introduction

Following my visit with Patricia Metham HMI to your academy on 13 and 14 May 2009, 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.

## Evidence

Inspectors observed the academy's work; scrutinised documents; and met with the principal, staff holding key roles in raising achievement, students, governors who were also academy sponsors, and the School Improvement Partner.

## Context

Walworth Academy is an 11–16 mixed secondary school with 863 students on roll. There are far more boys than girls. The academy was created in September 2007 following the closure of its predecessor, Walworth School. There are plans to open a sixth form in September 2010. The academy is operating on two sites but all students will move into new buildings on what is now the upper site in the spring term 2010. The sponsor, ARK Academies, currently runs six academies in London.

The academy specialises in mathematics and health and serves a part of London that includes areas of deprivation. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well above average. The academy is ethnically diverse. The two largest ethnic groups are White British, and Black and Black British African; other students are from a wide range of backgrounds, many with a Black or Asian heritage. The proportion of students whose first language is not English is well above average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also well above

average. However, the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.

The academy has a full complement of teaching staff, most of whom transferred from the predecessor school. The principal took up his post in September 2007. There have been some changes to the senior leadership team. A new leadership structure has been agreed and will be implemented from September 2009.

### Achievement and standards

The transformation in students' attitudes to learning is contributing to improving achievement and standards. The academy has worked well to raise students' aspirations and to encourage them to aim high. Standards on entry to the academy are well below average and many students join with literacy skills that are much lower than might be expected for their age. Relatively few students join Year 7 with levels of attainment at or above expected levels.

The academy is showing capacity to speed up students' rate of progress. In 2008, the proportion of students achieving five higher grade GCSEs was 41%. While overall standards at the end of Year 11 remained well below average, students made good progress in English and mathematics; 35% included these subjects in five higher-grade GCSEs.

The academy has introduced good systems for tracking the progress of students and has a clear picture of achievement across the school. It is acutely aware of variation in the performance between some groups of pupils, especially the performance of White British boys. Appropriate interventions are being systematically and rigorously implemented to tackle underachievement where it exists. There is also variation in students' performance from subject to subject, reflecting inconsistencies in teaching and learning and in the use of assessment information. However, teachers are developing their expertise in evaluating students' progress in relation to national curriculum levels and there is good practice to share. Older students are very aware of what level they are working at, but younger students are not so clear; overall, too many do not know what they have to do to improve their work.

Assessment information indicates that students are on track to achieve challenging targets that will bring standards significantly closer to national averages.

### Personal development and well-being

The behaviour and attitudes of students observed during the visit were consistently positive. Students were clear about, and proud of, the improvement in their personal development and well-being. They stressed the importance and impact of the academy's 'no tolerance' approach to anything that might fall short of the expected high standards. Students feel safe in school and understand the links between effective discipline, supportive relationships and successful learning. Those who attend regularly enjoy academy life, display high aspirations and are determined to

succeed. They appreciate how the academy is driving their learning and opening up opportunities for them. However, attendance is well below average, with a high proportion of persistent absence. The academy has identified the groups and individuals causing concern and is implementing an intensive and cohesive set of strategies, varying from rewards and sanctions to working with families to develop good patterns of attendance.

Students value the care, guidance and support the academy extends to them. They recognise that the strong emphasis on improving literacy, numeracy, and information communication technology (ICT) is helping to secure their future economic well-being. They appreciate the range of opportunities for work-related learning and the many enhancement activities they take up with enthusiasm.

There are a number of channels through which the 'student voice' is becoming increasingly influential. Students feel listened to and their views have shaped changes. For example, the balanced menu of healthy food available in the academy's cafeteria was finalised in consultation with students.

### Quality of provision

The monitoring of teaching gives due emphasis to how well pupils are learning. Teaching and learning are improving, with a higher proportion that is satisfactory or better. Good and outstanding practice is being shared, with more work to do in ironing out inconsistencies. Where teaching and learning are most effective, the following features are evident.

- Learning objectives derive from a clear understanding of individual students' prior attainment, are closely matched to students' needs and are used as a benchmark to check progress.
- Warm relationships support and promote learning.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge.
- Questioning requires students to develop their thinking skills and extend their verbal responses.
- A good variety of activities sequences learning and enables students to secure learning objectives.
- Cross-curricular links are made and key literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are developed.
- Assessment is used well to fill gaps in students' understanding and to clarify the next learning steps.
- There is a lively pace which is sensitive to the response of students.
- There are good opportunities for peer and self-assessment.

- Teachers model successful learning and use exemplar material skilfully.

The key areas of inconsistency are related to:

- the clarity, appropriateness and tailoring of learning objectives
- the quality of assessment and marking
- limited opportunities for students to develop learning skills that will give them independence and establish a lifetime habit of learning.

### Leadership and management

The principal's clarity of vision and determination to realise a better future for students is driving improvement at a pace. Governors share his ambition. Together, they work well as a skilful team to develop quickly systems that have a direct impact on improving students' achievement and well-being. As new policies and procedures become firmly established, their impact increases. The behaviour management policy is a good example of this. It emphasises learning as the priority and students are responding positively and meeting its expectations.

Senior leaders have a clear view of the academy's strengths and areas for development. A cycle of rigorous evaluation of the academy's work is becoming established and making staff accountable for students' attainment. Middle leaders are involved in these processes but there is more to do in some cases to develop leaders' capacity to assure the quality of their teams' work and to drive improvement themselves. Staff have embraced rapid change with the shared purpose of improving outcomes for students. Teamwork is becoming a strength, with effective communications ensuring cohesive support for students. Good opportunities for professional development exist, and link coherently with academy improvement plans and the individual needs of staff.

Plans to restructure staffing around the concept of developing smaller schools within the academy are well advanced and are being managed appropriately. A senior leader has been recruited to develop the academy's specialisms. Standards are rising in mathematics and students make good progress in the subject. The academy has organised mathematics master classes for Year 5 and 6 students in local primary schools. In addition, the academy promotes learning within the wider community by working in partnership with a college to offer mathematics tuition to adults.

Students' achievement and well-being are at the heart of the ongoing development of leadership and management. Strong foundations have been laid and this demonstrates good capacity for future improvement.

## External support

The academy has been placed on a firm footing for further development and has worked in close and valued partnership with the sponsors and the local authority to achieve this. Other support comes from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and a range of consultants. The support and links have been instrumental in strengthening management systems, for example the use of ICT to ensure comprehensive analysis and dissemination of performance data.

## Main Judgement

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

## Priorities for further improvement

- Improve students' attendance by developing strong partnerships with parents, further deepening students' engagement with learning, particularly in Key Stage 3, and working with feeder primary schools to establish good patterns of attendance.
- Develop further teachers' skills in making the best possible use of data on students' attainment to speed up their rate of progress.
- Increase the capacity of middle leaders to assure the work of their teams and to drive improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Academies Group at the DCSF. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely,

Jacqueline White  
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc chair of governors  
the Academies Group, DCSF