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Mrs L Jones  
Principal  
Colston Girls' School  
Cheltenham Road  
Bristol  
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Dear Mrs Jones

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Colston's Girls' School

## Introduction

Following my visit with Daniel Towl HMI, to your academy on 14 and 15 October 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit 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, staff, and the chair of governors, who is also a representative of the sponsors.

## Context

Colston Girls' School opened in September 2008 in the same accommodation as its predecessor school. The academy has specialist language status. Since 2008 the academy has been oversubscribed and the numbers of students in Years 7 and 8 are double the numbers in other year groups. About a fifth of students are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds, , and about one student in eight has a home language other than English. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals in Year 7 is just above the national average, although it is below average for the whole academy. The proportion of students with special educational needs

and/or disabilities is below the national average. Very few students join or leave the academy at times other than the start of the school year and just over half stay on into the sixth form.

The current principal has been in post for several years and has led the school through its transition to an academy. Illness within the senior leadership team has led to some necessary flexibility of roles and responsibilities.

A building programme to expand and improve the academy's accommodation is due to start in January 2010.

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

Standards are high with every student in Year 11 achieving five A\* to C grades at GCSE in 2009 and the very large majority achieving English and mathematics within these five. This was an improvement on the previous year, and the proportion of A and A\* grades also increased. Assessment information shows that students in the current Year 11 are on target to exceed this achievement in 2010. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are making progress in line with their peers but the academy is not yet systematically analysing the progress of different minority ethnic groups. Progress of students in the sixth form is satisfactory.

The academy has made a very good start in developing a robust system to monitor students' progress but has had some difficulties in collecting baseline data. Although assessment information is not available for all subjects, the current evidence shows that the first year of the academy intake, with a much wider range of ability on entry and a higher proportion of students with special educational needs, have made much better than average progress in mathematics over their first year. A personalised programme to support those students who arrive at the academy with reading difficulties has ensured that the vast majority have made significant gains in their skills in a very short time.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

The atmosphere in the academy is happy, welcoming and very calm, with Year 7 students reporting that they made friends quickly. Students attend well, behave in a mature way around the building and approach their learning with very positive attitudes. The whole academy community has a strong sense of identity with shared values and aspirations and students feel that all are valued and cared for equally. They are not concerned about bullying and say there is no racism. One student said how much she appreciated belonging to a community with such a wide diversity of backgrounds and ability. Students can contribute to the academy through the school council, attendance at extra curricular activities and participation in sports teams but the range of opportunities is limited as is the contribution the academy makes to the local and wider community, although funds are raised for charities. In the best

lessons, students are learning to work independently both on individual tasks and in small groups. This is a particular focus in Year 7, but is less strong in other year groups. Only limited opportunities are available for students to experience work related activities, such as enterprise events and work placements.

### The effectiveness of provision

Students enjoy their lessons, especially when they can be active and can take responsibility for their own learning. Relationships in classrooms are good with an atmosphere of trust and respect, so all feel confident and able to contribute. Just over half the lessons seen by inspectors during the visit were good or better, and it is clear that the involvement of some teachers with the local 'Outstanding Teachers' programme has had a positive impact on the quality of their teaching. Teachers have good subject knowledge and in most lessons the quality of questioning is good. However, in many lessons teachers are not sufficiently focused on, or routinely checking the quality of students' learning. Although assessment data and strategies for those with special educational needs are increasingly available for teachers, only a few are systematically using this information to plan lessons where work is accurately matched to students' individual needs. This is particularly necessary in mixed ability classes in Years 7 and 8, where the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than in other year groups. Students in lower ability sets do not always have the resources to support their learning effectively. Sometimes teachers talk for too long and do not give enough opportunity for students to be really active in lessons, or to work either in groups or independently. Although many students said they received good quality oral feedback, much of the marking seen by inspectors did not help students to see what they need to do to improve. Where targets are set for students, they are sometimes not sufficiently subject specific.

Safeguarding procedures meet all requirements. Staff are aware of child protection procedures and are diligent in following up issues of concern about students' welfare. Good links exist with the appropriate agencies and this helps to ensure that the academy is meeting the needs of its most vulnerable students. Recent staff appointments to manage special educational needs and monitor the welfare of students in Years 7 and 8 have significantly strengthened the academy's capacity to help all its students achieve well. There have been some considerable successes in helping students overcome both personal and learning difficulties, but the quality and organisation of paper work in matters of welfare and guidance is too variable. The academy is aware that guidance related to careers and work place experiences is an area for improvement. Students' moral and social development is good.

Plans are already in place to adjust the curriculum to match the needs and aspirations of a changing academy community. Partnership with another local academy has the potential to extend opportunities for the sixth form in the next academic year. In the first year of language specialist status, progress in developing

the curriculum has been good, and the academy now offers eight languages including Latin at GCSE. A wide range of extra-curricular activities are available.

### The effectiveness of leadership and management

Students in Years 7 and 8 are the first of the academy's intake and they have a wider range of ability and socio-economic background than students in Years 9 to 13. The senior leadership of the academy has recognised the need to alter provision to match their needs. The academy has made a good start at setting up a robust infrastructure that will support future developments. For example, a comprehensive tracking system is now in place and staff have the technology to use it, but as yet, there is no systematic analysis of the progress of different ethnic minority groups. Systems for assessing, monitoring and supporting vulnerable students are very thorough. The majority of middle leaders and teaching staff are very enthusiastic for change. They have adjusted to the new systems well, but have not yet embedded them enough into their day to day practice.

The headteacher is supported by an energetic and skilled senior leadership team which has the capacity to improve the academy further. Steady progress is being made to implement the development plan. Although priorities are appropriate, success criteria are not yet sufficiently focused on student outcomes and milestones are unclear. Middle management training is being provided to develop skills and give a new emphasis on accountability. Senior leaders' self-evaluation is accurate, but a clear cycle of robust monitoring and evaluation to identify improvement priorities, particularly the quality of teaching and learning, is at an early stage of development.

### External support

Senior leaders are making good use of external support from a range of sources. This has provided motivation and developed the skills of senior leaders and middle managers to make appropriate provision for a more diverse intake with a higher proportion of students with special educational needs. Involvement with the local 'Outstanding Teachers' programme has helped to improve the quality of teaching.

### Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Use the expertise already in the academy to develop a stronger focus on the quality of learning in classrooms so that every student makes good or better progress.
- Ensure that provision for all students is the best possible by:

- rigorously analysing the views, academic progress and personal needs of different groups and individuals
- maximising opportunities for all students to contribute to the academy and wider community.

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

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey  
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc chair of governors  
the Academies Group, DCSF [ [Paul.hann@dczf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.hann@dczf.gsi.gov.uk) ]