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Mr I Jones  
Headmaster  
Priory Academy LSST  
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Lincoln  
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Dear Mr Jones

Academies initiative: monitoring inspection to Priory Academy LSST

## Introduction

Following my visit with Tim Bristow 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 headmaster, executive headmaster, nominated staff, the chair of the Priory Trust governing body and groups of students.

## Context

The Priory Academy LSST opened in September 2008 as part of the Priory Federation of Academies Trust with The Witham Priory Academy and The Priory City of Lincoln Academy. Each academy works in equal partnership within the Priory Federation to achieve the Trust's overarching vision, but has its own ethos, governing committee and senior leadership team. The Priory Academy LSST's predecessor school, the Priory LSST, was an exceptionally high attaining school, and the academy has maintained its Foundation School character and its individual ethos. The academy has retained specialisms in science and technology, and also its status as a Training School. The headmaster took up post in September 2008, with the previous headmaster appointed as Executive Headmaster and a deputy headteacher appointed for post-16 provision, each with roles across the Priory

Federation. Almost all staff transferred from the predecessor school. The Priory LSST Academy had no new buildings, but plans are in place for a new sports complex, a science centre and boarding house for post-16 students.

The Priory LSST Academy is a large and popular school, and is heavily over-subscribed. There are currently 1791 students on roll, including 478 in the sixth form. The academy has retained the admissions criteria of the Foundation School whereby it invites applications from each of 50 named primary schools on a pro rata basis, as well as allocating up to 24 places on the basis of students' aptitude in the academy's specialist subjects. The academy consequently serves a wide catchment and attracts students of all ability. Nonetheless, the academy has a skewed intake when compared with other city schools: the students' attainment on entry is well above the national average; the proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is well below average; and the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well below the national figure. A very large majority of students are of White British heritage and the number who speak English as an additional language is low.

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

The academy has successfully maintained the exceptionally high attainment of its predecessor and has made significant progress in further raising standards. In GCSE examinations in 2008, 94.5% of Year 11 students in the predecessor school gained at least five A\*-C grades, including English and mathematics. In 2009, in its first year, the academy exceeded this figure, with almost all Year 11 students gaining at least five good GCSEs and almost 40% achieving at least five A\*-A grade GCSEs. Students make good progress, and there is no discernable difference between the progress of different groups of students. Pupils with special educational needs/disabilities make good progress and achieve exceptionally high standards of attainment.

Given their starting points, sixth-form students also make good progress and achieve standards of attainment that are above those seen nationally. In A-level examinations in 2009 the overall pass rate increased to 99.9%, the average points score improved and over half of A levels were graded either A or B.

The academy makes very good use of challenging targets and rigorous tracking data to maintain and improve its exceptionally high pass rates at both GCSE and A level, but also focuses effectively on gaining a higher proportion of top grades in order to further raise standards. Assessment information is collated systematically and is used rigorously to raise expectations and to target specific intervention and support for individual students who are in danger of falling behind. Evidence from lesson observations alongside the academy's assessment data and analysis of unvalidated examination results indicates that students make good progress over time.

Students are rightly proud of their academic successes and enjoy achieving well. They take pleasure in much of their learning and show a remarkable level of interest, enthusiasm and engagement in their lessons. They demonstrate excellent concentration, even during extended periods of fairly passive learning.

#### Other relevant pupil outcomes

Students benefit from an exceptional climate for learning that is created by the remarkable physical environment, the positive relationships that exist between adults and students, and academy's highly aspirational ethos. Students are expected to maintain the highest standards in their appearance, behaviour and in their attitudes, and they respond positively to the academy's very high expectations. They are polite and punctual; their behaviour in lessons and around the academy is exemplary and their attitudes to learning make a demonstrable contribution to their good academic progress and their personal development. There is no evidence of disruptive behaviour. Students show respect for one another and for the quality of their environment; they feel safe in the academy and are confident that any serious concerns will be dealt with swiftly. Students have a range of opportunities to make a positive contribution to the academy's development and are articulate in expressing their opinions. Some spoke positively about the role and impact of the student council, but a number also expressed the view that the academy does not take sufficient note of their views and suggestions, and even some of their concerns. The academy faces a considerable challenge in ensuring that it responds to the opinions and high aspirations of its articulate student body, and could do more to use the sensible views and evaluations of students to refine its provision. At 95.6% for the last academic year, attendance is well above average. There are very few fixed-term exclusions.

Students are very well prepared for the next stage in their education and for later life, both in terms of their academic achievement and their personal development. They mature as reflective and positive young adults who take a keen interest in social and ethical issues and are prepared to make a wider contribution to their academy and beyond. Many students take full advantage of the very wide range of extra-curricular provision, such as sport, music and specialist enrichment activities.

#### The effectiveness of provision

The academy makes good provision for its students because teaching is good and the curriculum meets their specific needs and because it has an impressive range of extra-curricular activities that enrich students' experiences. Most of the unusual elements, such as the accelerated Key Stage 3 curriculum and the extension subjects in classics, critical thinking and emotional intelligence, were in place prior to the academy's opening. Sensible steps have been taken to modify the curriculum, for example by increasing time allocated to science and reducing the number of information and communication technology qualifications, so that students can

achieve higher grades. The academy has explored the possibility of developing the programmes of study for students aged 14 to 19, but the strongly academic options meet the needs of the academy students and there are no immediate plans to extend this. Several developments have widened opportunities for students across the federation, such as the girls' football team, but there is no collaborative provision in Key Stage 4. Sixth-form options are open to all students, so that those from the partner academies can benefit from the wider range of subjects on offer at The Priory LSST Academy, although none of their students opt for courses elsewhere.

The quality of learning is good, and students make good progress in lessons and over time. Teaching is well planned and very well managed so that no time is wasted at the start or end of lessons. Most teachers have high expectations of what each class will do, and work is often very challenging, but there is a wide variation in the quality and pace of learning. The best lessons are lively and engaging and encourage all students to reflect on their own understanding and progress, so that they know how to improve. Assessment is regular and thorough, but there is often too little dialogue between teachers and students to ensure that the students understand how to improve specific aspects of their work and achieve their target grades. Most lessons are good, and some are outstanding, but a significant number observed were only satisfactory because teaching limited what individual students with different abilities might achieve. The most common shortcomings were rooted in superficial planning, particularly when planned learning outcomes presented insufficient challenge for different students, or when teachers had not considered how different students would learn. In several lessons the teacher talked for too long, while students sat and listened for information.

Procedures for pastoral care are very clear and well structured so that staff know their students well and provide a very high level of care and support to meet the individual needs of each student, including those with special educational needs.

#### The effectiveness of leadership and management

The transition from predecessor school to academy has been deliberately seamless. The academy has a clear strategic vision that is shared by staff at all levels and is based on high aspirations and the achievement of excellence for every individual. The step by step development of links between the three academies has been undertaken sensitively, so that staff and students can benefit from the economies of scale and the emerging strengths of each academy. Common policies and procedures are implemented to ensure that management systems operate efficiently and effectively, including those for safeguarding students and for monitoring and evaluating performance. The federation is able to offer staff a good range of professional development opportunities to suit their individual needs, both through training courses and longer term placements or exchanges. The advanced skills teachers are appointed to the federation and have a remit across all three academies. The Federation is also developing a wider role in leading developments,

such as the conferences for potential Oxbridge students and medical students, some of which are open to students countywide.

Self-evaluation is broadly accurate and is effectively used to shape priorities for improvement through development planning. There is in place a systematic programme for monitoring the quality of teaching, based on rigorous evaluation of key elements of teaching. The findings from lesson observations feed directly into the staff development programme, as well as providing staff with individual points for improvement.

Governance is strong and effective. The Trust governing body has a clear strategic oversight of the federation, with sub committees for each of the three academies to monitor the everyday work of each one. Governors are very knowledgeable about the academy and are in a strong position to provide suitable support and challenge. The academy has demonstrated, through its sustained improvement, that it has good capacity to improve.

#### External support

The academy makes comparatively little use of external support because it has the capacity to steer its own improvement. However, it has retained productive links with the local authority and values highly the support provided by its school improvement partner.

#### Main Judgements

The academy has made good progress towards raising standards and sustaining the exceptionally high levels of attainment achieved by the predecessor school.

#### Priorities for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding lessons by focusing more sharply on the elements of teaching that promote accelerated progress for students of all abilities in lessons.
- Develop the contribution that the students themselves are able to make to their learning and personal development, including their wider contribution to the community, by providing opportunities for students to reflect on their understanding and progress, by fostering their independence, and by making more use of student voice to evaluate provision and outcomes.

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

Paul Brooker  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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